Honoré de Balzac

LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

The Human Comedy

PRIVATE LIFE

VOLUME VII

THIS EDITION OF THE COMPLETE TRANSLATION

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JULIE AND LORD GRENVILLE

She relapsed into silence and allowed the hand she had held out toward the city to fall upon Arthur's hand. Together they admired in silence the landscape and the harmonious beauty of nature. The murmuring of the river, the purity of the air and sky, all were in accord with the thoughts that came rushing to their young and loving hearts.

"Ah! mon Dieu! how I love this country!" Julie repeated with increasing innocent enthusiasm.

THE NOVELS

OF

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME
COMPLETELY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

A WOMAN OF THIRTY
THE DESERTED MISTRESS

BY GEORGE BURNHAM IVES

WITH FIVE ETCHINGS BY CHARLES-THÉODORE DEBLOIS,
ADRIEN NARGEOT AND GASTON-LOUIS-STÉPHANIE
RODRIGUEZ, AFTER PAINTINGS BY
ADRIEN-MOREAU

IN ONE VOLUME

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A WOMAN OF THIRTY

TO LOUIS BOULANGER, PAINTER

NOTE FROM "HISTOIRE DES ŒUVRES DE BALZAC"

By M. Spoelberch de Lovenjoul

"The different chapters of this tale appeared separately in the first place, and even at the time of their first publication in book form, when they formed Volume IV. of the second edition of *Scènes de la Vie Privée*, May 1832, they were not connected, and a note by the publisher is the only indication of any connection between the chapters. In the following edition, in which the chapters are dated, —Volume IV. of the third edition of *Scènes de la Vie Privée*, 1834-35,—Balzac entitled the whole, *The Same Story*, and wrote a preface dated March 25, 1834, which explained his idea in substance; but it was not until 1842, in Volume III. of the fifth edition of *Scènes de la Vie Privée*—first edition of *La Comédie Humaine*—that the characters continued to bear the same names through the different chapters of the tale, which thereupon became definitively a continuous work. It is easy to discover the motive that led the author not to attribute in the first place to the same person the divers adventures of the *Woman of Thirty*. At the time when he published the different chapters of this work, which is supposed to begin in 1813, under the first Empire, the

heroine, if she had been the same person throughout, could not have attained the different ages he gives her in the different divisions of the tale, which covers a period of thirty-one years; therefore, when he prepared the last version that he corrected for the press, he was careful to date it 1828-1844, instead of 1828-1842, in order to lengthen the interval existing between the date of the beginning and that of the end of the work. He thus makes practicable the suggestion in the last line of the last chapter, that the narrative ends in 1844, and not in 1842, as in the preceding edition."

A WOMAN OF THIRTY

First Transgressions

*

Early in the month of April, 1813, there was a certain Sunday morning which gave promise of one of those lovely days when Parisians see, for the first time since the year began, pavements free from mud, and a cloudless sky. About noon a handsome cabriolet drawn by two spirited horses turned into Rue de Rivoli from Rue de Castiglione, and drew up behind several carriages standing in front of the newly-opened gate in the centre of the Terrasse des Feuillants. This smart equipage was driven by a man of careworn and sickly aspect; hair that was rapidly turning gray, hardly covered his yellow skull, and made him look prematurely old. He threw the reins to the mounted servant who followed the carriage, and alighted to take in his arms a young girl whose delicate beauty attracted the attention of the idlers sauntering on the terrace. The small person good-naturedly allowed herself to be

taken by the waist as she stood on the edge of the carriage; she put her arms about her companion's neck, whereupon he deposited her upon the sidewalk without soiling the trimming of her green velvet gown. A lover would not have taken so much pains. The stranger was in all probability the child's father, for she took his arm unceremoniously, without thanking him, and hurried him into the garden. The old father noticed the admiring glances of several young men, and his melancholy expression vanished for a moment. Although he had long since reached the age at which men should be content with the factitious enjoyment that vanity affords, he began to smile.

"They think you're my wife," he said in the young woman's ear, straightening himself up and walking at a moderate pace that drove her to despair.

He seemed inclined to flirt with his daughter, and enjoyed more than she did perhaps the way in which the bystanders stared at her little feet shod in laced shoes of puce-colored leather, at her graceful figure clad in a tightly-fitting gown, and at the white neck which an embroidered collarette did not entirely conceal. The motion of walking raised her dress from time to time and afforded a glimpse, above the shoes, of the rounded outline of a well-turned leg, in openwork silk stockings. So it was that more than one promenader overtook and passed the couple to steal another admiring glance at the youthful face, about which a few curls of chestnut

hair were playing, and whose pink and white coloring was enhanced, as well by the reflection of the pink satin lining of her dainty hat, as by the desire and impatience which sparkled in the pretty creature's every feature. A demurely mischievous expression gave animation to her lovely almond-shaped black eyes, surmounted by well-arched eyebrows, fringed with long lashes and immersed in transparent fluid. Life and youth displayed their treasures upon this rebellious visage, and upon a bust of graceful outline, despite the fact that the girdle was then worn immediately beneath the breast. Heedless of this silent homage, the girl looked anxiously toward the Château des Tuileries, which was doubtless the goal of her petulant promenade. It was quarter to twelve. Early as it was, several ladies, desiring to exhibit themselves in full toilette, were returning from the château, not without turning their heads discontentedly, as if repining because they had come too late to enjoy a spectacle they wished to see. Some of the words in which these disappointed fair promenaders gave vent to their ill-humor were caught on the wing by the pretty stranger and disturbed her to an extraordinary degree. The old man watched with curious, rather than mocking eyes, the signs of impatience and alarm playing upon his fair companion's face, and observed her too closely, perhaps, not to have had some paternal misgivings.

It was the thirteenth Sunday of the year 1813. Two days later Napoléon set out upon that fatal

campaign, during which he was to lose Bessières and Duroc in quick succession, to win the memorable battles of Lutzen and Bautzen, to find himself betrayed by Austria, Saxony, Bavaria, and by Bernadotte, and to fight the terrible battle of Leipsic. The magnificent parade ordered by the Emperor was destined to be the last of the long line that aroused the admiration of Parisians and foreigners for so many years. The Old Guard was to execute for the last time those matchless manœuvres whose dash and precision sometimes amazed even the Titan himself, who was preparing for his duel with Europe. A melancholy presentiment brought to the Tuileries a brilliant and an interested concourse. Everyone seemed to divine the future, and foresaw, it may be, that the imagination would, many a time, have to reproduce the picture of that scene, when the heroic days of France should assume, as is the case to-day, almost fabulous proportions.

"Do walk faster, father!" said the girl excitedly, drawing the old man along; "I hear the drums."

"The troops are marching into the Tuileries," he replied.

"Or marching out—everybody is going home!" she rejoined, with a childish petulance that made the old man smile.

"The parade doesn't begin until half-past twelve," he said, walking almost behind his impetuous daughter.

From the movement she imparted to his right arm, you would have said she was using it to assist

her in running. Her little hand, well-gloved, impatiently crumpled a handkerchief, and resembled a bark cleaving the waves. The old man smiled now and then, but sometimes, too, an anxious expression momentarily cast a shadow on his wrinkled face. His love for this lovely creature made him admire her in the present as much as he feared for her future. He seemed to be saying to himself: "She is happy to-day, will she be happy always?" For old men are rather inclined to view the future of young people in the light of their own disappointments. When the father and daughter reached the peristyle of the pavilion, from whose summit floated the tri-colored flag, and through which pedestrians go and come between the Tuileries garden and the Carrousel, the sentinels cried in solemn tones:

"No more can pass through!"

The child stood on tiptoe and succeeded in catching a glimpse of a crowd of elegantly dressed women on both sides of the old marble arch through which the Emperor was to make his appearance.

"You see, father, we started too late!"

Her little pout of vexation revealed the importance in her sight of her presence at the review.

"Well, let us go, Julie, you don't like to be crowded."

"Let us stay, father. I can see the Emperor from here; if he should die during the campaign, I should never have seen him."

The father started when he heard those egotistical words; his daughter spoke with sobbing voice; he

looked at her and thought that he could detect beneath her lowered eyelids a stray tear, caused not so much by annoyance as by one of those first disappointments, the secret of which it is not difficult for an old father to guess. Suddenly Julie blushed and uttered an exclamation, the meaning of which was understood neither by the sentinels nor the old man. At the sound of her voice, an officer who was hurrying from the courtyard toward the stairway turned quickly, walked forward as far as the pavilion, recognized the young woman who was hidden momentarily by the huge bearskin caps of the grenadiers, and immediately caused the order he himself had given to be waived as to her father and herself; then, undisturbed by the murmurs of the fashionable crowd laying siege to the pavilion, he drew the delighted Julie gently to his side.

"I am no longer surprised at her indignation or her ardor, since you are on duty," the old man said to the officer in a tone at once grave and jocose.

"Monsieur le Duc," the young man replied, "if you want good places, let us not waste time talking. The Emperor doesn't like to wait, and I am deputed by the grand marshal to notify him."

As he spoke, he had taken Julie's arm in a familiar way and was leading her rapidly toward the Carrousel. Julie saw with amazement an enormous crowd jammed into the small space between the gray walls of the palace and the stone posts connected by chains which marked out great sanded squares in the centre of the courtyard of the

Tuileries. The cordon of sentinels, stationed to ensure an unobstructed passage for the Emperor and his staff, had much ado not to be overborne by this eager multitude, buzzing like a swarm of bees.

"Will it be very fine?" Julie asked with a smile.

"Look out!" cried the officer, as he seized Julie around the waist and lifted her from the ground, with as much strength as rapidity of movement, to set her down beside a pillar.

Except for that abrupt manœuvre, his inquisitive kinswoman would have been struck by the hind-quarters of the white horse, saddled and bridled, with green velvet and gold accoutrements, which Napoléon's Mameluke was holding by the rein, almost under the arch and about ten steps behind all the other horses that were awaiting the grand officers of the household, the Emperor's companions. The young man placed the father and daughter near the first boundary post at the right, in front of the crowd, and commended them, with a nod, to the care of the two old grenadiers between whom they stood. When the officer returned to the palace, a joyous, happy expression had taken the place of the sudden fright depicted upon his features as a result of the horse's backward movement; Julie had given his hand a mysterious pressure, to thank him for the little service he had rendered her, perhaps, or to say to him: "At last I have a chance to see you!" She nodded her head pleasantly, in response to the respectful salutation the officer addressed to her and to her father before he hurried away. The

old man, who seemed to have left the young people together purposely, stood a little behind his daughter, with a serious expression on his face; but he watched her out of the corner of his eye, and tried to inspire in her a false feeling of security by seeming to be absorbed in contemplation of the magnificent spectacle presented by the Carrousel. When Julie looked round at her father with the timid glance of a scholar at his teacher, the old man answered her look with a bright, good-humored smile; but his keen eye had followed the officer under the arch, and no detail of this rapidly enacted scene had escaped him.

"What a magnificent sight!" said Julie in a low voice, pressing her father's hand.

The grand and picturesque spectacle presented by the Carrousel at that moment called forth similar exclamations from the tens of thousands of spectators, whose faces were all agape with admiration. Another crowd of people, as closely packed as that of which the old man and his daughter made part, occupied the narrow paved space along the Carrousel railing, parallel to the château. This last mentioned crowd, interspersed with ladies' costumes of every known hue, marked distinctly the fourth side of the immense oblong rectangle formed by the Tuileries buildings and this railing, then but recently erected. The regiments of the Old Guard which were to be passed in review filled that vast space, where they were drawn up in imposing blue lines, ten rows deep, facing the château. Outside the enclosure,

and in the Carrousel itself, were drawn up in parallel lines several regiments of infantry and cavalry, ready to defile under the triumphal arch which adorns the centre of the iron fence, and upon whose summit the magnificent horses from Venice were at this time to be seen. The regimental bands, stationed beneath the galleries of the Louvre, were hidden from sight by the Polish Lancers doing guard duty. A great part of the sanded square remained unoccupied as an arena for the manœuvres of these silent masses, drawn up with the symmetry of military science, their ten thousand gleaming bayonets reflecting the sun's rays thrice over. The breeze shook the plumes in the soldiers' helmets, causing them to wave back and forth as the trees in a forest bend before a strong wind. These seasoned troops, silent and splendid, presented innumerable contrasts of color due to the diversity of uniforms, facings, weapons and ornaments. The immense picture, a miniature battlefield before the battle, was poetically framed, with all its accessories and odd accompaniments, by the lofty, majestic buildings, whose immobility seemed to be imitated by officers and soldiers. The spectator involuntarily compared the walls of men to the walls of stone. The spring sun, shining brightly upon the white walls of recent construction and upon the other time-worn walls, lighted up the numberless tanned faces, all of which had tales of past dangers to tell and were gravely awaiting dangers still to come. The colonels of the different regiments rode back and forth alone in front

of the lines formed by those heroes. Behind the serried ranks, varied with bright patches of silver, azure, purple and gold, the onlookers could see the tri-colored streamers attached to the lances of six untiring Polish horsemen, who, like the dogs that guide a flock of sheep along the borders of a field, rode up and down incessantly between the troops and the spectators, to prevent the latter from passing beyond the limits of the small space allotted them near the imperial railing. Except for their movements you would have thought you were in the Sleeping Beauty's palace. The spring zephyr, passing across the grenadiers' bearskin caps, attested the immobility of the soldiers, even as the dull murmur of the crowd made their silence the more noticeable. At long intervals the echo of the Chinese bells, or an inadvertent tap upon a bass-drum, repeated by the echoes of the imperial palace, resembled the distant thunderclaps that give warning of a coming storm. Indescribable enthusiasm was expressed in the breathless suspense of the multitude. France was about to say farewell to Napoléon on the eve of a campaign, whose dangers were appreciated by the humblest citizen. This time the existence of the French Empire was at stake—to be or not to be. That thought seemed to stir the blood of the civilian and armed multitude alike as they stood elbow to elbow, equally silent, in the enclosure above which soared the eagle and the genius of Napoléon. Those soldiers, the last hope of France, her last drop of blood, counted for

much in the restless curiosity of the spectators. The majority of the latter had friends or kinsfolk among the troops to whom to say farewell, perhaps for ever; but all hearts, even those that were most hostile to the Emperor, prayed fervently for the glory of the fatherland. Those men who were most weary of the struggle that had begun between Europe and France laid aside their bitterness as they passed beneath the triumphal arch, realizing that in the day of peril Napoléon was France.

The clock upon the château struck the half-hour. Instantly the murmuring among the crowd ceased and the silence was so deep that a child's voice could have been heard from one end of the enclosure to the other. The old man and his daughter, who seemed to live only in their eyes, could distinguish a jingling of spurs and clashing of swords beneath the echoing peristyle of the château.

A short, stout man, in a green uniform with white breeches and riding-boots, suddenly made his appearance, wearing a three-cornered hat as fascinating as the man himself; the broad red ribbon of the Legion of Honor fluttered upon his breast, and a short sword dangled at his side. The Man was espied by every eye, at the same moment, in every part of the square. The drums at once beat the salute, the two bands began with a measure which was instantly repeated by all the instruments from the dulcet-toned flute to the huge bass drum. At that warlike strain, men's hearts beat fast, the flags were dipped, the soldiers presented arms with such

unanimous, machine-like precision of movement, that every musket in the Carrousel from the first rank to the last was shifted at the same instant. Words of command passed from line to line like echoes. Shouts of *Vive l'Empereur!* were taken up by the enthusiastic multitude. In a word, all was excitement, agitation, movement. Napoléon had mounted his horse. That act had given life to those silent masses, had given voices to the instruments, imparted animation to the eagles and standards, and stirred every heart. The very walls of the venerable palace's lofty galleries seemed also to shout: "*Vive l'Empereur!*" It was something more than human, it was a touch of sorcery, a simulacrum of the divine power, or, better still, a fleeting image of that fleeting reign. The man encompassed by such a wealth of love, enthusiasm and devotion, the man for whom the sun had driven the clouds from the heavens, sat motionless upon his horse, three paces in advance of the little bedizened staff in attendance upon him, with the grand marshal at his left, the marshal in attendance for the day upon his right. Sitting in the centre of this whirlwind of emotion aroused by the mere sight of him, his face betrayed no answering emotion.

"Oh! my God, yes. At Wagram, in the hottest of the fire, at the Moskowa among the dead, *he* was always calm as Baptiste!"

This reply to numerous questions was made by the grenadier who stood near the young girl and her father. Julie was for a moment absorbed in

contemplation of that face, whose perfect tranquillity indicated such confidence in the security of his power. The Emperor noticed Mademoiselle Chatillonnest, and said a few words to Duroc which brought a smile to the grand marshal's face. The manœuvres began. Although thus far the young woman had divided her attention between Napoléon's impassive face and the blue, green and red lines of the troops, at this moment, amid the rapid movements executed by the old soldiers with clock-like regularity, it was almost exclusively occupied by a young officer who was riding about among the moving lines and returning ever and anon with incredible activity to the group at whose head shone the simply-clad figure of Napoléon. The officer in question rode a superb black horse, and was easily distinguished, among that gayly appareled multitude, by the showy sky-blue uniform of the Emperor's orderlies. His gold lace sparkled so brightly in the sun and the plume of his long, narrow shako was so dazzling to behold, that the spectators might well have compared him to a will-o'-the-wisp, to a visible spirit commissioned by the Emperor to inspire and guide the battalions, whose waving weapons shot forth gleams of fire, when, at a signal from his eyes, they broke in twain, formed in dense masses, and turned this way and that like waves in a narrow gulf, or passed before him like the long, straight, towering surges angry Ocean leads against its shores.

When the manœuvres were at an end, the orderly

officer rode up at full speed, and halted in front of the Emperor to await his orders. At that moment he was within twenty paces of Julie, facing the imperial group, in an attitude not unlike that Gérard has given General Rapp in the picture of the *Battle of Austerlitz*. Thereupon the maiden had an opportunity to gaze admiringly at her lover in all his military splendor. Colonel Victor d'Aiglemont, then about thirty years old, was tall, well-built and slender; his symmetrical proportions never showed to better advantage than when he was exerting his strength to control a horse, whose graceful, supple back seemed to bend beneath him. His bronzed manly face possessed that inexplicable charm which perfect regularity of feature imparts to youthful countenances. His brow was broad and high. His flashing eyes, shaded by thick eyebrows and bordered with long lashes, stood out like two white ovals between two black circumferences. His nose had the graceful curve of an eagle's beak. The purple coloring of his lips was made more pronounced by the inevitable wavy black moustache. His full, high-colored cheeks had a brownish-yellow tinge which denoted more than common strength. His face—one of those upon which personal valor has set its seal—was of the type sought by the artist who dreams to-day of painting one of the heroes of the France of the Empire. The horse, which was drenched with sweat, was tossing his head in a manner indicating extreme impatience; his fore feet were planted a short distance apart and

upon exactly the same line, and he was thrashing his flanks with his long, luxuriant tail. His devotion presented a materialized image of his master's devotion to the Emperor. When she saw how engrossed her lover was in catching a glance from Napoléon, and reflected that he had not yet looked at her, Julie had a momentary feeling of jealousy. Suddenly a word was uttered by the sovereign; Victor pressed his knees against his charger's sides and rode off at a gallop; but the shadow of a stone post on the sand frightened the beast, which shied, started back and reared, all so suddenly that his rider seemed in danger. Julie shrieked and turned pale; everyone turned and stared curiously at her, but she saw no one; her eyes were fixed upon the too spirited horse, which the officer chastised soundly as he rode away to carry out Napoléon's orders. The bewildering scene absorbed Julie so completely that she unconsciously clung to her father's arm, and involuntarily revealed her thoughts to him by the pressure of her fingers. When Victor was on the point of being thrown backward by the horse, she seized her father more violently than before, as if she had herself been in danger of falling. The old man gazed with gloomy, sorrowful disquietude at his daughter's expressive face, and an expression of pity, of jealousy, of regret even, crept into every wrinkle. But, when the unaccustomed brilliancy of Julie's eyes, the shriek she uttered, and the convulsive movement of her fingers put the final touches to the disclosure of a secret passion, certain it is

that he must have had some painful revelations of the future, for his features assumed a sinister expression. At that moment, Julie's soul seemed to have passed into the young officer's body. A thought even more cruel than all those that had previously alarmed the old man contracted his careworn features, when he saw D'Aiglemont, as he rode by, exchange a glance of intelligence with Julie, whose eyes were moist, and whose face glowed with extraordinary animation. He abruptly led his daughter into the Tuileries garden.

"Why, father, there are still some regiments on the Place du Carrousel that are going to drill."

"No, my child, the troops are all marching off."

"I think you're mistaken, father; Monsieur d'Aiglemont went to order them forward—"

"But I am not well, my dear, and I can't stay."

It was not difficult for Julie to believe her father when she glanced at his face, to which his paternal anxiety imparted an expression of deep distress.

"Do you feel very ill?" she asked in an indifferent tone, her mind was so full of other things.

"Isn't every day a day of grace for me?" the old man replied.

"Are you going to grieve me again by talking about your death? I was so happy! Come, drive away these miserable black thoughts of yours!"

"Ah! you spoiled child!" cried the father with a sigh; "the kindest hearts are sometimes very cruel. Is it nothing, pray, that we devote our lives to you, think only of you, do everything to secure your

welfare, sacrifice our own inclinations to your whims, even shed our blood for you? Alas! yes, you accept it all with utter indifference. To obtain your smiles and your disdainful love forever, one must have God's power. And then another comes! a lover, a husband steals your heart from us."

Julie gazed at her father in amazement as he walked slowly along, meeting her gaze with dull, expressionless eyes.

"You even conceal your thoughts from us," he continued, "but, perhaps, from yourselves, too—"

"What do you mean, father?"

"I think you have secrets from me, Julie.—You are in love," continued the old man hastily, as he saw that his daughter blushed. "Ah! I hoped that you would be faithful to your father as long as he lived, I hoped to keep you by my side, happy and beautiful! to admire you as you were a little time ago. If I had known nothing of your destiny, I might still have believed in a calm and peaceful future for you; but now it is impossible for me to carry with me to the grave a hope that your life will be a happy one, for you love the colonel more than the cousin. I can no longer doubt that."

'Why should I be forbidden to love?" cried she eagerly with awakened interest.

"Ah! my Julie, you wouldn't understand me," replied the father with a sigh.

"No matter, tell me," she replied, with a suspicion of rebellion in her tone.

"Well, my child, listen to me, then; young girls

often create in their own minds noble, fascinating images, wholly ideal figures, and invent chimerical ideas as to men and sentiments and the world in general; then they in their innocence endow a character with the attributes of perfection they have dreamed of, and place their trust in it; they love this creation of their imagination in the man of their choice; but, later, when it is too late to avert the catastrophe, the deceitful phantom they have embellished, their first idol, is transformed into a hideous skeleton. Julie, I would rather see you in love with an old rake than with the colonel. Ah! if you could see yourself as you will be ten years hence, you would do justice to the warnings of my experience. I know Victor; his gayety is mere empty-headed, barrack gayety; he has no talent and is a spendthrift. He is one of the men created by Heaven to eat and digest four meals a day, sleep, love the first woman he sees, and fight. He doesn't understand life. His kind heart—for he has a kind heart—would lead him perhaps to give his purse to an unfortunate, to a comrade; but he is a heedless fellow; but he hasn't that delicacy of sentiment that makes us the slaves of a woman's happiness; but he is ignorant and selfish.—There are *buts* enough."

"However, father, he must have wit and talent to have been made a colonel—"

"My dear, Victor will remain a colonel all his life. I have never seen anyone who seemed to me to be worthy of you," said the old father fervently.

He paused a moment, looked earnestly at his daughter, and added:

"But, my dear Julie, you are still too young, too weak, too delicate to endure the vexations and worry of marriage. D'Aiglemont has been spoiled by his parents, just as you have been spoiled by your mother and myself. How can we hope that you will understand each other, with your two distinct wills, tyrannical and irreconcilable? You will tyrannize or be tyrannized over. Either alternative brings an equal burden of woe into a woman's life. But you are sweet-tempered and modest, and you will bend at first. In short," said he in a faltering voice, "you have a charm of sentiment which will be misunderstood, and then—"

He did not finish; his tears prevented him.

"Victor," he continued after a pause, "will wound the ingenuous qualities of your young heart. I know soldiers, my Julie; I have lived in the army. It rarely happens that the heart of one of those fellows can triumph over the habits growing out of the misery amid which they live, or of the chances and changes of their adventurous lives."

"Then you propose, father," retorted Julie in a tone halfway between jest and earnest, "to disregard my feelings, to marry me to suit yourself and not to suit myself?"

"Marry you to suit me!" cried the father with a gesture of surprise; "to suit me, whose friendly scolding voice you will soon hear for the last time,

my child. I have always found that children attribute to personal feeling the sacrifices their parents make for them! Marry Victor, my Julie. Some day you will bitterly deplore his worthlessness, his lack of order, his selfishness, his indelicacy, his insincerity in love, and a thousand other causes of disappointment that will come to you through him. When that time comes remember that here, under these trees, your old father's prophetic voice appealed to you in vain!"

The old man said no more, for he saw that his daughter was shaking her head in a rebellious way. They walked toward the gate where their carriage was waiting. During this silent walk, the young girl furtively examined her father's face and the pouting expression gradually vanished from her own. The profound sorrow depicted on that downcast brow made a deep impression upon her.

"I promise you, father," she said in a sweet, trembling voice, "to say no more of Victor until you have laid aside your prejudices against him."

The old man stared at his daughter in amazement. Tears started from his eyes and rolled down his wrinkled cheeks. He could not kiss Julie in the presence of the crowd that stood about them, but he tenderly pressed her hand. When he entered the carriage, all the anxious thoughts that had clouded his brow had entirely disappeared. The somewhat melancholy attitude of his daughter disturbed him much less than the innocent joy, the secret of which she had betrayed during the review.

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In the early days of the month of March, 1814, a little less than a year after the Emperor's last review, a calèche rolled along the road from Amboise to Tours. Upon leaving behind the green summits of the walnut trees, beneath which lies hidden the little posting station of La Frillière, the carriage proceeded at such a rapid pace that in a very few moments it reached the bridge over the Cise where that river empties into the Loire, and there it stopped. A trace had broken as a result of the energetic application of the lash by a young postilion, at his master's order, to the four fresh and vigorous post horses. So it chanced that the two occupants of the calèche, upon awakening, were able to contemplate at their leisure, one of the most beautiful landscapes the charming banks of the Loire can present. At his right the traveler's glance embraced all the windings of the Cise, which flows, like a silvery serpent, through the grass of the level plains to which the first shoots of the spring gave the hue of the emerald. At his left the Loire appeared in all its magnificence. The innumerable faces of the little waves stirred up by the cool morning breeze, reflected the scintillating rays of the sun upon the broad bosom of that majestic stream. Here and there green islands dotted the surface of the water like the stones of a necklace. Upon the other

shore, the loveliest countryside in Touraine unfolded its treasures as far as the eye could reach. In the distance, the view was limited only by the hills along the Cher, whose summits at that moment traced lines of light against the transparent azure of the sky. Through the delicate foliage of the islands, in the background of the picture, Tours seemed, like Venice, to rise from the bosom of the waters. The spires of its venerable cathedral shot up into the air, where they blended with the fantastic masses of grayish-white clouds. Beyond the bridge at which the carriage had stopped, the traveler could see in front of him, extending along the Loire to Tours, a chain of cliffs which, by a whim of nature, seem to have been stationed there to imprison the river, whose waves resistlessly wear the rock away —a sight that always arouses the wonder of travelers. The village of Vouvray nestles among the gorges and depressions of these cliffs, which begin to describe a curve just below the bridge over the Cise. From Vouvray to Tours the terrifying declivities of this broken hillside are inhabited by vinedressers. In more than one spot there are three rows of houses, one above another, upon sites hollowed out of the cliff, and connected by dangerous staircases hewn in the rock. On the roof of one house, a young woman in a short red petticoat is tending her garden. The smoke from a chimney floats up between the vine-branches. Laborers are ploughing almost perpendicular fields. An old woman, living tranquilly upon a caved-in section of

the cliff, turns her spinning-wheel under the flowering branches of an almond tree, and watches the travelers passing at her feet, smiling at their terror. She pays no more heed to the fissures in the ground than to the overhanging ruin of an old wall, the courses of which are held in place only by the twining roots of a cloak of ivy. The cooper's hammer wakes the echoes under the arches of aërial cellars. In a word, every inch of ground is cultivated and fruitful, where nature has provided no room for the purposes of human industry. For this reason, there is nothing along the whole course of the Loire worthy to be compared to the superb panorama which Touraine here presents to the traveler's eyes. The threefold picture, whose beauties we have scarcely hinted at, produces an impression upon the mind which is inscribed forever in its memory; and when a poet has feasted his eyes upon it, in his dreams he often reconstructs its romantic effects in fabulous guise.

As the carriage reached the bridge over the Cise, several white sails came out from between the islands of the Loire and added one more element of harmony to the harmonious spectacle. The odor of the willows that border the river added a penetrating perfume to the savor of the moist breeze. The birds kept up a ceaseless concert; the monotonous song of a goatherd imparted a tinge of sadness to the scene, while the cries of the bargemen told of life and excitement in the distance. Light wreaths of vapor, clinging capriciously about the scattered

trees in the vast landscape, added a last charm. It was Touraine in all its glory, the springtime in all its splendor. This part of France, the only part that foreign armies are not likely to disturb, was at that moment the only part that enjoyed a semblance of tranquillity; one would have said that it defied the invader.

A head arrayed in a foraging cap was thrust out of the calèche as soon as it ceased to move; but the next moment an officer, impatient at the delay, opened the door for himself and leaped down into the road as if to berate the postilion. But the skill with which that Tourainian was splicing the broken trace, reassured Colonel Comte d'Aiglemont, who walked back toward the carriage, stretching his arms as if to limber up his sleeping muscles. He yawned, glanced at the landscape, and placed his hand upon the arm of a young woman carefully enveloped in a fur cloak.

"Look, Julie," he said in a hoarse voice, "wake up and look at the country! It is magnificent."

Julie put her head out of the calèche. She wore a marten fur cap, and the folds of the cloak in which she was wrapped, so effectually concealed her figure that naught of her could be seen but the face. Julie d'Aiglemont was no longer the light-hearted girl who was so joyous and happy at the review at the Tuileries a few short months before. Her face, still delicate in outline, had lost the fresh, rosy coloring that gave it its rich glow. The black tufts of hair, uncurled by the damp night air, brought into strong

relief the ivory-whiteness of her skin, whose lustre seemed dead. But her eyes shone with unnatural fire, and beneath their lids there were dark violet patches upon her worn cheeks. She cast an indifferent glance at the distant hills beside the Cher, the Loire and its islands and the long cliffs of Vouvray; then, without taking the trouble to look at the lovely valley of the Cise, she threw herself back into the calèche, and said, in a voice that seemed extremely weak in the open air:

"Yes, it is lovely."

She had, as we see, triumphed over her father, to her undoing.

"Julie, wouldn't you like to live here?"

"Oh! here or somewhere else," she said, carelessly.

"Aren't you well?" Colonel d'Aiglemont asked.

"Perfectly," replied the young woman, with momentary animation.

She looked at her husband with a smile, and added:

"I am very sleepy."

Suddenly they heard a horse galloping behind them. Victor d'Aiglemont released his wife's hand and turned his head toward the bend in the road a short distance away. As soon as his eyes were removed from her, the cheerful expression she had forced her pale face to wear vanished as if some light had ceased to shine upon it. As she had no desire to look again at the landscape, nor curiosity to know who the horseman was who was galloping

up at such a furious rate, she sank back into the corner of the calèche and fixed her eyes upon the horses' backs without a trace of emotion of any sort. Her whole manner was as stupid as that of a Breton peasant listening to his curé's sermon.

A young man, riding a blooded horse, suddenly emerged from a clump of poplars and flowering hawthorns.

"That's an Englishman," said the colonel.

"Mon Dieu, yes, general," replied the postilion. "He's one of the fellows that want to eat up France, so they say."

The stranger was one of the travelers who happened to be upon the continent when Napoléon caused the arrest of all the English in France, by way of reprisal for the assault upon the law of nations by the cabinet of Saint James at the time of the rupture of the Peace of Amiens. Being subject to the imperial caprice, these prisoners did not all remain in the residences where they were seized, nor in those places which they were at first allowed to select for themselves. The majority of those who were at this time living in Touraine had been transferred thither from different parts of the Empire, where their residence seemed likely to endanger the success of the Emperor's continental policy. The young captive who was taking the morning air for his ennui at that moment was a victim of the bureaucratic power. Two years before, an order emanating from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had torn him away from the mild climate of

Montpellier, where the rupture of the peace found him seeking relief from an affection of the lungs.

As soon as the young man saw that Comte d'Aiglemont was a military man, he showed great eagerness to avoid his scrutiny, and turned his head abruptly toward the plains of the Cise.

"These Englishmen are all as insolent as if the world belonged to them," muttered the colonel. "Fortunately Soult's in a fair way to give them a sound thrashing."

As the prisoner passed the calèche, he cast his eyes inside. Although it was but a glance his admiration was awakened by the melancholy expression which gave an indefinable charm to the countess's pensive face. There are many men whose hearts are deeply moved by the slightest indication of suffering in a woman: in their eyes, pain seems to be a token of constancy or of love. Julie, gazing fixedly at one of the cushions of the calèche, paid no heed to horse or rider. The trace was speedily and satisfactorily repaired. The count re-entered the carriage. The postilion exerted himself to make up for lost time, and drove his two passengers rapidly along that part of the levée which runs at the foot of the overhanging cliffs, in whose bosom the wines of Vouvray ripen, where so many attractive houses raise their heads among the foliage, and where, in the distance, can be seen the ruins of the famous abbey of Marmoutiers, the retreat of Saint-Martin.

"What does that diaphanous *milord* want of us?"

cried the colonel, turning his head to make sure that the horseman who had been following his carriage from the bridge over the Cise was the young Englishman.

As the stranger violated none of the canons of courtesy by riding along the edge of the *levée*, the colonel fell back into the corner of the calèche, after darting a threatening glance at the Englishman. But he could not, despite his involuntary feeling of hostility, refrain from noticing the beauty of the horse and the grace of the rider. The young man had one of those typical English faces, with a skin so soft and white, and complexion so clear that one is sometimes tempted to fancy that they belong to the slender body of a girl. He was tall and slender, and fair. His dress was marked by the neatness and distinction characteristic of the men of fashion in prudish England. One would have said that he blushed from modesty rather than from pleasure at seeing the countess. Once only did Julie raise her eyes to look at him; and then she was in a measure forced to do so by her husband, who wanted her to admire the legs of a thoroughbred horse. Julie's eyes thereupon met the bashful Englishman's. From that moment instead of keeping his horse near the calèche he followed it some few paces behind. The countess barely looked at him. She noticed none of the human or equine points of excellence that were called to her attention, and threw herself back into the carriage after expressing her agreement with her husband by a slight movement

of the eyebrows. The colonel fell asleep and the husband and wife reached Tours without exchanging a word; nor had the fascinating, ever-changing landscapes through which they passed, once attracted Julie's attention. She glanced at her husband several times while he was asleep. Just as she looked at him the last time, the jolting of the carriage caused a medallion that was hanging from her neck by a mourning chain to fall upon her knees, and her father's portrait suddenly looked up into her face. At that sight the tears, until then held back, filled her eyes. Perhaps the Englishman saw the glistening lines the tears made for a moment on the countess's pale cheeks, although the wind quickly dried them.

Entrusted by the Emperor with orders for Maréchal Soult, who was defending France from the invasion of the English in Béarn, Colonel d'Aiglemont availed himself of the opportunity afforded by his mission, to remove his wife from the perils by which Paris was then threatened; and he was taking her to an old kinswoman of his own at Tours. Soon the carriage crossed the bridge, rumbled over the pavements through Grande Rue, and halted in front of the ancient mansion in which the former Marquise de Listomère-Landon dwelt.

The Marquise de Listomère-Landon was one of the lovely old women with pale cheeks and white hair, who have a winning smile, who seem made to wear hoopskirts, and who wear caps of no known style. Such women are septuagenarian portraits of the age

of Louis XV.; they are almost always caressing in their manner as if they were still in love; they are less reverent than pious, and less pious than they seem to be; always exhaling the odor of powder *à la maréchale;* good story-tellers, better talkers, and more inclined to laugh at a memory than a jest. They care little for the present. When an aged maid-servant informed the marchioness—for she was soon to resume her title—of the arrival of a nephew whom she had not seen since the outbreak of the war in Spain, she hastily removed her spectacles, closed the *Galerie de l'Ancienne Cour*, her favorite book, and with something resembling agility of movement, reached the landing as the husband and wife were coming up the stairs.

The aunt and the niece exchanged a swift glance.

"Good-morning, my dear aunt," cried the colonel, putting his arms about the old lady and kissing her hurriedly, "I am bringing you a young person to keep for me. I confide my treasure to you. My Julie is neither a flirt nor jealous; she has an angelic disposition—But she won't be spoiled here, I trust," he added, without completing his sentence.

"Bad boy!" the marchioness rejoined with a mischievous glance at him.

She took the initiative, offering, with a certain attractive grace, to kiss Julie, who retained her thoughtful expression and seemed more embarrassed than interested.

"So we are to know each other at last, my dear heart," said the marchioness. "Don't be too much

afraid of me; I try never to be old with young people."

Before escorting her guests to the salon, the marchioness ordered breakfast for them in accordance with provincial customs; but the count interrupted his aunt's flow of talk to say to her in a serious tone that he could give her no more time than was required to change horses at the posting station. The three, therefore, repaired at once to the salon, and the colonel hardly had time to narrate to his kinswoman the events, political and military, which forced him to ask her to give shelter to his young wife. During this narration, the aunt looked alternately at her nephew, who talked on without interruption, and at her niece, whose pallor and melancholy she assumed to be due to this enforced separation. She seemed to be saying to herself: "Oho! these young people really love each other!"

At that moment, the cracking of a whip was heard in the silent old courtyard, where the flagstones were outlined by tufts of grass. Victor embraced his aunt again and rushed out of the house.

"Adieu, my dear," he said, kissing his wife, who followed him out to the carriage.

"Oh! Victor, let me go farther than this with you," she said in a coaxing tone, "I don't want to leave you."

"Can you think of such a thing?"

"Well, then, adieu," said Julie, "if you will have it so."

The carriage disappeared.

*

"So you love my poor Victor very dearly, do you?" queried the marchioness, questioning her niece with one of the knowing looks old ladies sometimes bestow upon their juniors.

"Alas! madame," Julie replied, "must one not love a man dearly to marry him?"

This last sentence was uttered with an ingenuousness of tone and manner that instantly betrayed either a pure heart or a heart capable of profound dissimulation. Now it was very hard for a woman who had been the friend of Duclos and the Maréchal de Richelieu not to seek to guess the secret of this young couple. The aunt and niece were at that moment on the threshold of the porte-cochère, watching the departing calèche. The countess's eyes did not express love as the marchioness understood it. The good lady was a Provençal and her passions had been of the perfervid kind.

"So you have allowed yourself to be taken in by my good-for-nothing nephew, have you?" she asked.

The countess started involuntarily, for the old coquette's accent and expression seemed to indicate that her knowledge of Victor's character was perhaps more extensive than her own. Ill at ease, she enveloped herself in the awkward dissimulation which is the first refuge of innocent and suffering

hearts. Madame de Listomère was content with such replies as Julie chose to give her, but she thought, gleefully, that her solitude was to be enlivened by some love secret, for her niece seemed to her to act as if she had some entertaining intrigue on foot. When Madame d'Aiglemont found herself in a large salon hung with tapestry surrounded by gilt mouldings, when she was seated in front of a roaring fire, sheltered from the window draughts by a Chinese screen, she tried in vain to banish her melancholy humor. It was a difficult matter for cheerfulness to flourish under such venerable hangings, surrounded by furniture hoary with age. Nevertheless, the young Parisian experienced a sort of pleasure in the profound solitude, in the solemn silence of the province. After exchanging a few words with this aunt to whom she had but lately written as a bride, she was as dumb as if she had been listening to the music of an opera. Not till after two hours of silence worthy of La Trappe, did she realize her discourtesy to her aunt and remember that she had done nothing more than reply coldly to her questions. The old lady had respected her niece's whim with the instinctive grace characteristic of the survivors of the olden time. The dowager was knitting. She had, indeed, left the room several times to look after the arrangement of a certain *green* room which the countess was to occupy, and where the servants were bestowing her luggage; but she had returned to her place in a capacious easy-chair and cast furtive glances at the

younger woman. Ashamed of having yielded to her irresistible inclination to muse, Julie tried to obtain forgiveness by making sport of herself.

"My dear love, we know how widows suffer," the aunt replied.

One must be forty years old to appreciate the ironical expression that played about the old lady's lips.

The next day the countess was much better; she talked. Madame de Listomère no longer despaired of taming this bride of a day, whom she had at first judged to be a stupid, savage creature; she talked to her about the pleasures of the country, about the balls they could attend and the houses at which they could visit. All the marchioness's questions during that day were so many snares, which, by force of habit acquired long before at court, she could not refrain from setting for her niece, to assist in fathoming her character. Julie resisted all the solicitations addressed to her for some days to go abroad in search of amusement. And so, notwithstanding the old lady's longing to put her pretty niece on exhibition, she finally abandoned her purpose of taking her into society. The countess had found a pretext for her sadness and her desire for solitude in the death of her father, for whom she was still in mourning. A week passed and the dowager had come to admire Julie's angelic sweetness, her charming modesty, her indulgent disposition, and thenceforth interested herself prodigiously in the mysterious melancholy which was gnawing

at that young heart. The countess was one of the women who are born to be loved and who seem to bring happiness in their train. Her company became so pleasant and so invaluable to Madame de Listomère that she lost her heart to her and insisted that she should never leave her. A month sufficed to cement an everlasting friendship between them. The old lady noticed, not without surprise, the changes that took place in Madame d'Aiglemont's countenance. The vivid coloring that set her cheeks aflame faded insensibly away, and her face became pallid and lustreless. As she lost her first bloom, Julie became less sad. Sometimes the dowager stirred her young kinswoman to outbursts of gayety and mad laughter, soon repressed by an unwelcome thought. She felt sure that neither her father's memory nor Victor's absence was the cause of the profound melancholy that cast a shadow over her niece's life and upon that she had so many uncharitable suspicions that it was hard for her to decide upon the real cause of the trouble, for we may say that we fall in with the truth only by chance. But one day Julie dazzled the eyes of her astonished aunt by manifesting utter disregard of her marriage, by displaying the reckless humor of a giddy girl, together with an innocence of mind, a childish simplicity worthy of primitive times and the perfection of the refined wit, sometimes so profound, characteristic of the young women of France. Madame de Listomère thereupon resolved to sound the mysterious depths of this mind, whose extreme

ingenuousness was equivalent to the most inscrutable dissimulation. Night was coming on and the two ladies were sitting at a window looking on the street; Julie had resumed her pensive manner; a man rode by on horseback.

"There's one of your victims," said the old lady.

Madame d'Aiglemont looked up at her aunt with an expression of mingled amazement and disquiet.

"He's a young Englishman, of noble birth, the Honorable Arthur Ormond, eldest son of Lord Grenville. His is an interesting story. He came to Montpellier in 1802, hoping that the air of that province, to which he had been advised to go by his physicians, would cure him of a lung disease which would otherwise be fatal. Like all his compatriots, he was arrested by Bonaparte when the war broke out, for that monster can't do without war. For amusement, the young Englishman began to study his disease, which was supposed to be mortal. Insensibly he contracted a taste for anatomy and medicine generally; he became passionately fond of the whole science,—an extraordinary thing in a man of quality; but the Regent dabbled in chemistry! In short, Monsieur Arthur made wonderful progress, even in the estimation of the profession in Montpellier; study consoled him in his captivity, and at the same time he became completely cured. They say he went two whole years without speaking, breathing but seldom, lying all the time in a stable, and living on the milk of a cow brought from Switzerland and fresh water cresses. Since he has

been at Tours he hasn't called on anyone, he's as proud as a peacock; but you have certainly made a conquest of him, for it isn't on my account probably that he has been passing under our windows twice a day since you have been here.—He certainly is in love with you."

These words aroused the countess as if by magic. She allowed a gesture to escape her and a smile that greatly amazed the marchioness. Far from manifesting the instinctive satisfaction felt by the most uncompromising of women when she learns that she is making a man wretched, Julie's glance was cold and listless. Her features indicated a feeling of repulsion closely akin to horror. It was not the proscription decreed by a loving woman against the whole world for the benefit of a single being; no, Julie was at that moment like a person in whose mind the memory of a danger still too vividly before her, keeps alive the suffering it caused. The aunt, thoroughly convinced as she was that her niece did not love her nephew, was dumfounded to discover that she loved no one. She trembled at the thought of finding that Julie's heart was disenchanted, that the experience of a single day, of a single night perhaps, had sufficed to show her Victor's absolute nullity.

"If she knows him, it's all over," she thought, "and my nephew will soon have to undergo the inconveniences of married life."

She thereupon determined to convert Julie to the monarchical doctrines of the age of Louis XV.; but a

few hours later she learned, or guessed the condition of affairs—by no means an unusual condition—to which the countess's melancholy humor was due. Julie, who had suddenly become thoughtful, went to her room earlier than usual. When her maid had undressed her and had left her all prepared for bed, she continued to sit before the fire, buried in the depths of a yellow velvet *duchesse*, an old-fashioned couch as comfortable for the afflicted as for happier folk; she wept, she sighed, she mused; then she drew up a small table, found some paper and began to write. The hours flew swiftly by; the secrets Julie was confiding to the paper seemed to cost her dear, for every sentence was preceded by a long fit of musing; suddenly she burst into tears and stopped. At that moment, the clocks struck two. Her head, as heavy as that of a dying person, fell forward on her breast, and when she raised it again, she saw her aunt standing before her as if one of the figures had come forth from the tapestry with which the walls were hung.

"What in the world is the matter with you, my darling?" said her aunt. "Why do you sit up so late and above all things, why are you weeping here all alone, at your age?"

She sat down beside Julie without further ceremony, and devoured with her eyes the letter she had begun.

"Were you writing to your husband?"

"Have I any means of knowing where he is?" the countess replied.

The aunt took up the letter and read it. She had brought her spectacles, so there was premeditation. The innocent creature allowed her to take the letter without the least remonstrance. It was neither a lack of dignity nor any secret consciousness of guilt, which thus deprived her of all her energy; no, her aunt happened upon her at one of those critical moments when the mind is inert, indifferent to everything, good and evil, silence and confidence alike. Like a virtuous maiden who pours out the vials of her scorn upon a lover, but, when evening comes, is so depressed and feels so deserted that she longs for him, and seeks a heart to which to confide her suffering, Julie, without a word, allowed the seal that delicacy affixes to an open letter to be violated, and sat pensively by while her aunt read:

"MY DEAR LOUISA:

"Why so persistently demand the fulfilment of the most imprudent promise two ignorant girls can make each other? You often wonder, you write me, why I haven't answered your questions for six months past. If you have failed to understand my silence, perhaps you will guess at the explanation of it to-day, upon learning the mysteries I am about to reveal to you. I should have kept them buried forever in the deepest recesses of my heart, had you not told me of your approaching marriage. You are about to marry, Louisa. The thought makes me shudder. Poor dear love, marry; and then, a few months hence, one of your bitterest regrets will arise from the memory of what we were so short a time ago, when we sat one evening at Ecouen, under the tallest oaks on the mountain, and gazed down upon the lovely valley at our feet and went into ecstasies over the rays of the setting sun, which enveloped us in a flood of light. We were sitting

upon a fragment of rock and fell into a sort of trance, to which the sweetest melancholy succeeded. You were the first to fancy that the distant sun spoke to us of the future. We were very inquisitive and giddy in those days. Do you remember all our mad pranks? We embraced like lovers, we said. We swore that the one who should first be married would tell the other all the secrets of wedded life, the joys which our childish hearts pictured as so entrancing. The memory of that evening will drive you to despair, Louisa. In those days you were young and fair and thoughtless, if not happy; a husband will make you, in a few days, what I already am, ugly, miserable and old. To tell you how proud I was, how vain and glad, to marry Colonel Victor d'Aiglemont, would be downright madness! Indeed, how could I tell you? I can hardly remember myself. In a few moments my girlhood became like a dream to me. My demeanor during the solemn day which gave divine sanction to a bond, whose full meaning was hidden from me, was not free from blame. My father over and over again tried to repress my high spirits, for I manifested my delight to an extent that was deemed unseemly, and my words seemed mischievous simply because there was nothing mischievous about them. I played a thousand childish tricks with my wedding veil and my gown and flowers. When I was left alone, at night, in the room to which I had been taken with great pomp, I tried to devise some roguery to puzzle Victor; and, while I was waiting for him to come, my heart beat as it used to do on the awe-inspiring 31st of December, when I would steal, unperceived, into the salon where the New Year's gifts were piled up. When my husband came in and began to look for me, the stifled laughter that escaped me behind the muslin curtains was the last manifestation of the sweet, girlish gayety that enlivened our youthful pleasures—"

When the dowager had finished reading what was written of this letter, which, after such a beginning,

might be expected to contain some very melancholy reflections, she slowly took off her spectacles and laid them on the table, placed the letter beside them, and gazed at Julie with a pair of bright eyes, whose light was not yet dimmed by age.

"My love," said she, "a married woman cannot write thus to an unmarried friend without offending against the proprieties—"

"That's what I thought," Julie interrupted, "and I was ashamed while you were reading—"

"If something that is offered us at table doesn't suit our taste, my child," continued the old lady good-humoredly, "we mustn't try to make others turn up their noses at it; especially as marriage has seemed such an excellent thing, from Eve's days to our own.—You have no mother?"

The countess started, then raised her head slowly, and said:

"I have had reason to long for my mother more than once this last year; but I did wrong not to heed my father's objections; he didn't desire Victor for a son-in-law."

She glanced at her aunt, and a thrill of joy dried her cheeks when she saw the kindly expression on that venerable face. She held out her slender, girlish hand to the marchioness, who seemed to solicit it; and when their fingers met, a complete understanding was established between the two women.

"Poor orphan!" exclaimed the aunt.

The word was like a ray of light to Julie. She seemed still to hear her father's prophetic voice.

"Your hands are burning! Are they always so?" the old lady asked.

"I haven't been without this fever for seven or eight days," she replied.

"You have been suffering with fever and have concealed it from me!"

"I have had it a year," said Julie, with a sort of shamefaced anxiety.

"And so, my dearest angel," continued her aunt, "marriage thus far has been nothing but one long affliction to you?"

The younger woman dared not reply, but she made an affirmative gesture which betrayed her suffering.

"You are unhappy?"

"Oh! no, dear aunt, Victor loves me idolatrously, and I worship him, he is so good!"

"Yes, you love him; but you avoid him, don't you?"

"Yes—sometimes.—He seeks me too often."

"Aren't you often troubled, when you are alone, by the fear that he will come and take you by surprise?"

"Alas! yes, dear aunt. But I love him dearly I promise you."

"Do you not even blame yourself in secret because you cannot share his enjoyment? Does it not sometimes occur to you that legitimate love is harder to bear than an illicit passion would be?"

"Ah! that is just it," she said, weeping. "And you understand everything, where it is all an

enigma to me. My mind is benumbed, I haven't an idea in my head, indeed I find it hard to see. My heart is oppressed by an indescribable apprehension that freezes my emotions and casts me into a constant stupor. I have no voice to complain, no words to express my anguish. I suffer, and I am ashamed to suffer when I see that Victor is made happy by what is killing me."

"This is all nonsense, child's play!" cried the aunt, her withered face suddenly lighted up by a bright smile, the reflection of the enjoyments of her younger days.

"And you laugh with the rest!" exclaimed the young woman despairingly.

"I have been through the same experience," replied the marchioness without hesitation. "Now that Victor has left you alone, aren't you a young girl again, calm, without pleasure it is true, but also without suffering?"

Julie gazed at her in open-eyed bewilderment.

"In a word, my angel, you adore Victor, eh? but you would rather be his sister than his wife, and marriage hasn't been a success with you?"

"Well, yes, aunt that is true. But why smile?"

"You are right, my poor child. There's nothing very amusing in all this. Your future would have more than one disaster in store for you, if I didn't take you under my protection, and if I, with my long experience, were not able to guess the innocent cause of your disappointment. My nephew didn't deserve his good luck, the idiot! In the reign of

Louis XV., the Well-Beloved, a young woman who found herself in a position you are in would soon have punished her husband for acting like a moss-trooper. The selfish brute! That imperial tyrant's soldiers are all ignorant wretches. They take brutality for gallantry, and they know no more about women than they know about loving; they think that they are relieved of the duty of showing us any consideration or attention because they may be going out to be killed the next day. In the old days military men knew how to love as well as how to die when the time came. I will put him in shape for you, my niece, I will put an end to the lamentable disunion—natural enough—which will eventually bring you to hate each other and to long for divorce, unless you die of it before you are driven to despair."

Julie listened to her aunt with no less amazement than stupefaction, surprised to hear words whose wisdom was felt rather than understood by her and almost terrified to hear from the mouth of a kinswoman of wide experience the same judgment, albeit in a somewhat milder form, that her father had passed upon Victor. It may be that she had an intuition of what her future was to be, and felt in anticipation the weight of the misfortunes that were destined to overwhelm her, for she burst into tears and threw herself into the old lady's arms, crying:

"Be my mother!"

The aunt did not weep, for the Revolution left but few tears in the eyes of the women of the old

monarchy. Love in the old days, and, later, the Terror have familiarized them with the most painful ups and downs of fortune, so that amid the perils of life, they preserve a cold dignity, a sincere, but unexpansive affection, which enables them to remain faithful to the etiquette of the old court and to the nobility of bearing which the new régime has been so ill-advised as to cast off. The dowager took the young woman in her arms, and kissed her on the forehead with an affectionate grace which is found in the manners and customs of such women more frequently than in their hearts; she cajoled her with soft words, promised her a happy future, and soothed her with promises of love to come, assisting her to undress as if she had been her daughter, a dearly-loved daughter whose hopes and griefs were her own; she seemed to see herself, young once more, and inexperienced and attractive, in the person of her niece. The countess fell asleep, happy in the thought that she had found a friend, a mother, to whom thenceforth she could tell everything.

The next morning, as the aunt and niece were exchanging kisses with the heartfelt cordiality and air of mutual understanding which prove a step forward in affection, a more perfect cohesion between two hearts, they heard the sound of a horse's hoofs in the street, turned their heads at the same moment, and saw the young Englishman riding slowly by, as his custom was. He seemed to have made a study of the life led by these two lone

women, and never failed to make his appearance when they were at breakfast or dinner. His horse slackened his pace without being told to do so, and during the time required to pass the space between the two windows of the dining-room, Arthur would cast a melancholy glance within, which was for the most part disdained by the countess, who paid no heed whatever to it. But the marchioness, long since inoculated with the prying curiosity touching the most trivial things that help to give zest to life in the provinces, and which superior minds find it difficult to escape altogether, was much diverted by the shy but serious passion tacitly manifested by the Englishman. His periodic glances had become a part of the daily routine to her, and every day she had some new jest to make concerning the passing of Arthur. As they took their seats, the two women looked simultaneously at the islander. Julie's eyes and Arthur's met so squarely on this occasion that the young woman blushed. The Englishman immediately put spurs to his horse and galloped away.

"What are we to do, madame?" said Julie to her aunt. "People who see that Englishman pass ought to know that I am—"

"Yes?" the marchioness interrupted.

"Well, couldn't I tell him not to ride by here as he does?"

"Wouldn't that be likely to make him think that he is dangerous? And then can you prevent a man from going and coming where he sees fit? To-morrow we won't have our meals in this room; when

he sees that we are not here the young gentleman will discontinue loving you through the window. That, my dear child, is the way a woman acts, who knows the ways of the world."

But Julie's cup of woe was to be filled to overflowing. The two ladies had hardly left the table when Victor's valet de chambre made his appearance. He had come from Bourges at full speed, by the shortest route, and brought the countess a letter from her husband. Victor, who had left the Emperor, wrote to inform his wife of the fall of the Empire, the capture of Paris, and the enthusiasm for the Bourbons that was breaking out in every part of France; but as he did not know how to make his way safely to Tours, he begged her to come in all haste to Orléans, where he hoped to be waiting for her with passports. The valet, an old soldier, was to accompany Julie from Tours to Orléans, as Victor believed the road between those places to be still open.

"You haven't a moment to lose, madame," said the man; "the Prussians, Austrians and English are to make their junction either at Blois or Orléans—"

The young woman was ready in a few hours, and left Tours in an old traveling carriage loaned her by her aunt.

"Why don't you come to Paris with us?" she said to the marchioness as she embraced her. "Now that the Bourbons are in power once more, you will find there—"

"Even without this unhoped-for overturn, I should

have gone to Paris, my poor girl, for my advice is too necessary to you and Victor, both of you. So I will make all my arrangements to join you there."

Julie set out with her maid, accompanied by the old soldier, who galloped beside the carriage, looking after his mistress's well-being. Toward night, as they reached a relay station outside of Blois, Julie, who was somewhat uneasy on the subject of a carriage whose wheels she had heard close behind her own ever since leaving Amboise, stationed herself at the door to see who her fellow-travelers might be. By the light of the moon she could distinguish Arthur, standing within three paces of her, with his eyes fastened upon her carriage. Their glances met. The countess hastily drew back with a thrill of fear that made her heart beat fast. Like most young women who are really innocent and inexperienced, she looked upon it as a crime to have inspired a passion in a man's heart. She felt an instinctive terror, caused perhaps by the consciousness of her inability to withstand such an audacious aggression. One of man's strongest weapons is this terrible power of compelling the attention of a woman whose naturally vivid imagination is alarmed or offended by pursuit. The countess remembered her aunt's advice and resolved to remain in her carriage throughout the journey and not to leave it on any pretext. But, at every relay, she heard the Englishman walking about the carriages; and, upon the road, the incessant rumbling of his vehicle resounded constantly in her ears. It soon

occurred to the young woman that when she was with Victor once more, he would know how to defend her against this extraordinary persecution.

"But suppose this young fellow is not in love with me, after all?"

This was the last of all her reflections. Upon reaching Orléans, her carriage was stopped by the Prussians, taken to the courtyard of an inn, and guarded by soldiers. Resistance was out of the question. The foreigners explained to the three travelers by imperious signs, that their orders were to allow no one to leave the carriage. For about two hours the countess was held a prisoner in the midst of a number of soldiers, who smoked and joked and sometimes stared at her with impertinent curiosity; but at last she saw them stand aside with demonstrations of respect, as several horses galloped up. Soon a party of foreign officers of high rank, headed by an Austrian general, surrounded the carriage.

"Madame," said the general, "accept our apologies; there has been a mistake, you may continue your journey without apprehension, and here is a passport which will spare you all annoyance henceforth."

The countess took the paper with trembling hand, and uttered a few vague words in a faltering voice. Standing beside the general, in the uniform of an English officer, she saw Arthur, to whom, without doubt, she owed her speedy deliverance. The young Englishman turned away his face, which

wore an expression of joy mingled with sadness, and dared not look at Julie except by stealth.

Thanks to the passport, Madame d'Aiglemont reached Paris without accident. She there found her husband, who, being released from his oath of fealty to the Emperor, had received a most flattering welcome from the Comte d'Artois, appointed Lieutenant-General of the kingdom by his brother, Louis XVIII. Victor held an eminent position in the Gardes du Corps, which gave him the rank of general. But, amid the rejoicing attending the return of the Bourbons, a very serious disaster which influenced her whole life, befell poor Julie; she lost the Marquise de Listomère-Landon. The old lady died of joy and of an attack of gout of the heart, when she saw the Duc d'Angoulême at Tours. Thus, the person whose age gave her the right to speak freely to Victor, the only person who, by cleverly worded advice, could bring about perfect concord between husband and wife, was dead. Julie realized the full extent of her loss. There was nobody now but herself betwixt herself and her husband. But, young and timid as she was, she preferred at first to suffer rather than to complain. The very perfection of her character prevented her from neglecting her duty or from trying to fathom the cause of her suffering; to put an end to it would have been too delicate an undertaking: Julie would have been afraid of shocking her maidenly modesty.

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A word as to Monsieur d'Aiglemont's career under the Restoration.

Are there not many men whose utter nullity is a secret to most of their acquaintances? High rank, illustrious birth, important functions to perform, a certain polish of courtesy, a reserved demeanor, the prestige that attends great wealth, are to them like bodyguards that prevent critics from prying into their inmost lives. Such people resemble kings, whose real stature and character and morals can never be well understood or properly estimated because they are seen too far away or too close at hand. Credited with qualities they do not possess, such people ask questions instead of talking, and have the knack of placing others on the stage in order to avoid the necessity of posing before them; and then, with happy tact, they pull everyone by the string of his passions or his selfish interests, and thus play with men who are really their superiors, make marionettes of them, and fancy they are small like themselves because they have pulled them down to their own level. They thereupon achieve the natural triumph of a trivial, but persistent idea over great, but unstable ideas. And so, in order to pass judgment upon these empty heads and estimate their negative value, the observer should possess a subtle rather than a superior mind,

patience rather than great breadth of view, and adroitness and tact rather than loftiness and grandeur of thought. And yet, however skilful these usurpers may be in keeping their weaknesses hidden from sight, it is very hard for them to deceive their wives, their mothers, their children, or the friend of the family; but such persons almost always keep their own counsel touching a matter that concerns, in some sense, the family honor, and very often assist them to impose upon society. If, thanks to such domestic conspiracies, many fools pass for superior men, they make up for the number of superior men who pass for fools, so that the social hierarchy has always the same proportion of apparent talents.

Now, consider the part a woman of intelligence has to play in presence of a husband of this sort; can you not imagine lives filled to overflowing with sorrow and self-sacrifice, for which nothing to be obtained here on earth can recompense certain hearts overcharged with love and delicacy of feeling? Let a woman be placed in this horrible position and she extricates herself from it by a crime, as Catherine II. did, who is called Catherine the Great none the less. But, as all women do not sit upon thrones, they submit, as a rule, to domestic catastrophes which are none the less terrible because they are unknown. Those who seek instant consolation for their ills on earth often simply change the form of their suffering when they seek to remain faithful to their duties, or commit grievous errors if they violate

the law for the benefit of their pleasures. These reflections are all applicable to Julie's secret history. While Napoléon remained at the head of affairs, Comte d'Aiglemont, a colonel, like many others, a good orderly officer and an excellent man for a dangerous mission, but incapable of any independent command of importance, aroused nobody's envy, was looked upon as one of the gallant soldiers whom the Emperor particularly affected, and was what is called in military parlance *a good fellow.* The Restoration, which restored his title of marquis, did not find him ungrateful: he followed the Bourbons to Ghent. This logical act of fidelity gave the lie to the horoscope his prospective father-in-law drew for him when he said that he would always be a colonel. After the second return of the Bourbons, Monsieur d'Aiglemont, appointed lieutenant-general and re-created a marquis, was fired with ambition to be made a peer; he adopted the opinions and the policy of the *Conservateur*, wrapped himself in a dissimulation which concealed nothing, became grave, asked many questions, talked but little, and was deemed a profound thinker. Taking refuge constantly in the forms of politeness, fortified with formulas, storing away in his memory and making lavish use of the set phrases which are coined with great regularity in Paris to give fools the meaning of great ideas and great deeds in small change, he was esteemed by society at large a man of taste and learning. Obstinate in his aristocratic opinions, he was cited as the possessor of an estimable

character. If, by chance, he manifested some trace of his former thoughtlessness and gayety, the insignificance of his meaningless words was supposed by others to cover much unexpressed meaning.

"Oh! he says only what he chooses to say!" was the thought of many very worthy people.

He was as well served by his good qualities as by his defects. His gallantry procured him an excellent military reputation which there was nothing to depreciate, because he had never commanded in chief. His manly, noble features expressed breadth of intellect, and his face was an imposture to none but his wife. When he heard everybody praising his supposititious talents, the Marquis d'Aiglemont was eventually persuaded that he was one of the most noteworthy men at court, where, thanks to his exterior, he made himself agreeable, and where his various qualities were accepted without protest.

Nevertheless, Monsieur d'Aiglemont bore himself modestly in his own house; he had an instinctive consciousness of his wife's superiority, young as she was; and of his involuntary respect for her was born an occult power which the marchioness was compelled to accept, notwithstanding her persistent efforts to put the burden aside. As her husband's adviser, she guided his actions and directed his fortune. This unnatural influence was a sort of humiliation to her, and the source of many sorrows which she buried in her heart. In the first place, her subtle feminine instinct told her that it is much more

glorious to obey a man of talent than to lead a sot, and that a young wife, obliged to think and act as a man, is neither man nor woman, that she abdicates all the charms of her sex while avoiding none of its woes, and acquires none of the privileges our laws bestow upon the stronger sex. Her existence concealed a bitter mockery. Was she not obliged to do honor to a hollow idol, to protect her protector, a poor creature who tossed her the selfish love of a husband as the wages of her unremitting devotion, who saw in her only the wife, who did not deign or did not know how—and one was as deep an insult as the other—to take thought for her enjoyment, or to seek the reason of her melancholy and of the fading of her charms? Like most husbands who feel the yoke of a superior mind, the marquis saved his self-esteem by reasoning from Julie's physical weakness that she was morally weak, and amused himself by pitying her, calling fate to account for having given him a sickly girl for his wife. In short, he posed as the victim, whereas he was the executioner. The marchioness, burdened with all the misery of this deplorable existence, must continue to smile upon her imbecile master, to bedeck a house of mourning with flowers, and to wear a mask of happiness upon a face made pale by secret torment. This responsibility for the family honor, this magnificent self-abnegation, insensibly imparted to the young wife a womanly dignity, a consciousness of virtue, which served as a safeguard against the perils of the world. Furthermore—to

probe this heart to the bottom—it may be that the private, hidden sorrow by which her first, her innocent girlish love was crushed, caused her to conceive a horror of all passion; perhaps she had no conception of the emotion, the illicit but delirious bliss that makes some women forget the laws of wisdom, the principles of virtue upon which society rests. Renouncing, as an empty dream, the sweet delights, the loving harmony which Madame de Listomère-Landon, in the light of her long experience, had promised her, she awaited with resignation the end of her misery, hoping to die young. Since her return from Touraine, her health had failed every day, and life seemed measured by suffering; refined suffering, be it understood, an illness that was almost a luxury so far as appearances went, and that superficial people might look upon as the whim of a coquette. The doctors had condemned the marchioness to spend her time lying on a divan, where she pined away amid the flowers that surrounded her, fading like them. Her weakness made it impossible for her to walk in the air; she never went out except in a closed carriage. Always encompassed by all the marvelous creations of our modern ideas of luxury, she resembled an indolent queen rather than an invalid. Some few friends, in love perhaps with her unhappiness and her weakness, sure of finding her always at home, and speculating doubtless upon the possibility of her future restoration to health, came to bring her the news of the day and to tell her of the thousand and one

trivial occurrences that give so much variety to life in Paris. Her melancholy, although deep-seated and serious, was therefore the melancholy of opulence. The Marquise d'Aiglemont resembled a lovely flower whose root is gnawed by a black insect. She went occasionally into society, not from inclination, but in obedience to the demands of the position to which her husband aspired. Her voice and the perfection of her style of singing might enable her to reap a harvest of such applause as almost always flatters a young woman; but what cared she for triumphs that had no connection with her feelings or her hopes? Her husband did not like music. In short, she was almost always intensely bored in the fashionable salons, where her beauty attracted selfish tributes. Her position aroused a sort of cruel compassion, a pitying curiosity. She was afflicted with a species of inflammation, not uncommonly fatal, which women whisper about among themselves, and for which our neology has not as yet succeeded in inventing a name. Notwithstanding the silence in which her life was passed, the cause of her suffering was a secret to nobody. Still a modest young girl, although married, the least obtrusive glance made her ashamed. And so, to avoid having to blush, she was always laughing and gay, whenever she appeared in society; she affected a cheerfulness she did not feel, always said that she was well, or forestalled questions concerning her health by mild falsehoods.

In 1817, however, something happened that contributed materially to modify the lamentable state in which Julie had previously existed. She had a daughter and insisted upon nursing it. For two years, the keen interest and anxious pleasure resulting from the cares of motherhood made her life less wretched.

She necessarily lived apart from her husband. The doctors predicted that her health would be improved; but the marchioness placed no faith in their hypothetical diagnosis. Perhaps, like all those for whom life has ceased to have any charm, she looked forward to death as a happy ending.

At the beginning of the year 1819, her life was harder to bear than ever. Just when she was congratulating herself upon the negative happiness she had succeeded in attaining, she caught a glimpse of yawning chasms in her path; her husband had, by degrees, weaned himself from her. This cooling off of a passion which had already become so lukewarm and selfish might have more than one deplorable result, which her keen tact and her prudence enabled her to foresee. Although she was certain of retaining great influence over Victor, certain that his esteem was hers forever, she feared the effect of his passions upon a man so empty-headed, vain and unreflecting as he. Often it happened that Julie's friends surprised her buried in meditation; the less far-sighted jokingly asked her why it was, as if a young woman ought never to think of aught but trifles, as if there were not almost always great

depth of feeling in a mother's thoughts. Moreover, unhappiness leads to reverie no less than genuine happiness. Sometimes, as she was playing with her little Hélène, Julie would gaze at her with a gloomy expression in her eyes and cease to reply to the childish questions that so delight a mother's heart, to muse upon her destiny, present and future. Her eyes would be wet with tears, when suddenly something would remind her of the scene at the review at the Tuileries. Once more her father's prophetic words would ring in her ears, and her conscience would reproach her for having failed to appreciate their wisdom. All her woes were due to her wilful disobedience; and it often happened that she could not make up her mind which of them all was hardest to bear. Not only did the sweet treasures that her heart contained remain unknown, but she could never succeed in making herself understood by her husband, even in the most ordinary affairs of life. Just when the faculty of loving was attaining its most vigorous and most active development, at that moment lawful love, conjugal love vanished, while she was afflicted by serious physical and mental ills. Then she felt for her husband that compassion which is akin to contempt, and in the end withers all sentiment. But even if her conversation with some of her friends, if the examples she saw before her, if certain occurrences in high life had not taught her that love sometimes brings untold bliss, her own wounds would have enabled her to divine the deep, pure joy that should form a

lasting bond between the hearts of those who love like brothers. In the picture her memory drew of the past, Arthur's innocent face appeared, purer and fairer day by day—but for a moment only, for she dared not dwell upon it. The young Englishman's silent, bashful love was the only incident since her marriage that had left the memory of a soothing touch upon her lonely, dejected heart. Perhaps all the crushed hopes, all the abortive longings which had gradually cast a gloom upon Julie's mind, might be referred, by the natural working of the imagination, to that young man, whose manners, sentiments and character seemed to touch her own at so many points. But that thought always seemed a mere fancy, a dream. After the impossible vision, always ending with a sigh, Julie would awake more wretched than before, and feel her latent sorrows even more keenly when she had sought to lull them to sleep beneath the wings of imaginary happiness. Sometimes her lamentations took on a tone of madness, of audacity—she would have pleasure in her life at any price; but more frequently she sat as if benumbed and stupefied, listened without understanding, or conceived such vague, hesitating ideas of what was said to her, that she could have found no words in which to set them forth. Wounded in her most secret desires, disenchanted as to matters she had dreamed of as a girl, she was obliged to restrain her tears. To whom could she complain? by whom could she be heard? Moreover, she had the extreme womanly delicacy, the charming modesty

of feeling which consists in repressing a fruitless complaint, in refusing to take an unfair advantage when the triumph is certain to humiliate both victor and vanquished. Julie tried to confer her own talents, her own virtues upon Monsieur d'Aiglemont and pretended to enjoy a happiness that her life lacked. All her woman's wit was employed to no purpose in manœuvres unheeded by the very man whose despotism they perpetuated. At times she was fairly drunk with unhappiness, bereft of ideas and of mental balance; but, happily, true piety always brought her back to the supreme hope of the believer; she took refuge in the thought of the life to come,—marvelous faith which enabled her to take up anew her grievous burden. These terrible struggles, these internal convulsions brought her no glory, her long fits of melancholy were unknown; no mortal saw her dull, glazed eyes, her bitter tears shed at random and in solitude.

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The perils of the critical situation at which the marchioness had insensibly arrived by force of circumstances were revealed to her in all their gravity on a certain evening in the month of January, 1820. When a husband and wife know each other perfectly and have been long accustomed to each other's peculiarities, when a woman knows how to interpret a man's slightest gesture and can fathom the thoughts or the facts he is concealing from her, then the light often breaks suddenly upon her, after reflection or observation due entirely to chance, or made heedlessly in the first instance. It often happens that a woman awakes suddenly on the brink or at the bottom of a precipice. So it was that the marchioness, happy to have been alone for some days, divined the secret of her solitude. Inconstant or weary, generous or compassionate, her husband no longer belonged to her. At that moment she ceased to think of herself, of her suffering, of her sacrifices; she was the mother only, and could think of nothing but the fortune, the future, the welfare of her daughter; her daughter, the only being who ever brought her happiness; her Hélène, the only treasure that bound her to life. Now Julie wished to live, to preserve her child from the terrible yoke beneath which a cruel step-mother might choke the

dear creature to death. At this new foreboding of a miserable future, she fell into one of those fits of feverish meditation which consume whole years of one's life. Between her husband and herself thenceforth there would be a whole world of thoughts, the weight of which must be borne by her alone. Hitherto, sure that Victor loved her as much as it was in his power to love, she had devoted herself to the interests of a happiness she did not share; but, to-day, having no longer the satisfaction of knowing that her tears were her husband's joy, alone in the world, naught remained to her but a choice between two evils. In the midst of the discouragement which, in the calm silence of the night, deprived her of all strength, just as she left her couch and her almost extinct fire and went to gaze, dry-eyed, upon her daughter, Monsieur d'Aiglemont returned home in high spirits. Julie called him to admire Hélène as she lay asleep; but he greeted his wife's enthusiasm with a trite remark.

"At that age, all children are pretty," he said.

Then, having carelessly kissed his daughter on the brow, he lowered the curtains of the cradle, looked at Julie, took her hand and led her to a seat beside him on the couch where so many fatal thoughts had had their birth.

"You are very lovely to-night, Madame d'Aiglemont!" he cried with the intolerable gayety that was so well known to the marchioness to mean nothing at all.

"Where did you pass the evening?" she asked, feigning the utmost indifference.

"At Madame de Sérizy's."

He had taken a screen from the mantelpiece and was scrutinizing it attentively, paying no heed to the traces of the tears his wife had shed. Julie shuddered. Words are powerless to describe the torrent of thoughts which struggled to escape from her heart, and which she had to retain there.

"Madame de Sérizy gives a concert next Monday, and she is dying to have you come. The fact that you haven't been seen in society for a long while is enough to make her want to have you at her house. She's a good soul and is very fond of you. You will please me by going; I almost promised for you."—

"I will go," was Julie's reply.

There was something so searching, so unusual in the marchioness's tone and accent and look, that Victor, despite his heedlessness, gazed at his wife in amazement. That was the end. Julie had guessed that Madame de Sérizy was the woman who had stolen her husband's heart. She sank into a reverie of despair, and seemed busily occupied in looking at the fire. Victor turned the screen round and round in his fingers with the bored expression of a man who, having enjoyed himself elsewhere, brings the fatigue of enjoyment home with him. When he had yawned several times, he took a candle in one hand and put out the other in a languid way toward his wife's neck as if to embrace her; but Julie bent her head, presented her forehead,

and received there the mechanical, loveless, good-night kiss, a sort of grimace which seemed hateful to her at that moment. When Victor had closed the door, the marchioness fell upon a chair; her legs trembled, she burst into tears. One must have undergone the torture of an analogous scene to realize all the suffering that was hidden in this one, to understand the long and terrible dramas to which it led. The simple, senseless words, the periods of silence between husband and wife, their gestures and glances, the way in which the marquis had seated himself in front of the fire, his attitude as he essayed to kiss his wife's neck,—everything had combined to make that hour a tragic ending to the solitary, unhappy life led by Julie. In her frenzy, she fell on her knees before her couch, buried her face in it so that she could see nothing, and prayed to Heaven, giving to the familiar words of her prayer a peculiar accent, a new significance which would have torn her husband's heart if he had heard her. She passed a whole week in anxious thought concerning her future, abandoned to her misery, of which she made a study, seeking a way to avoid lying to her heart, to regain her influence over the marquis, and to live long enough to watch over her daughter's welfare. She thereupon determined to contest the field with her rival, to reappear in society and make a sensation there, to feign an affection for her husband which she could no longer feel, to fascinate him; and then, when by her wiles she had forced him to submit to her power, to be

coquettish with him like those capricious mistresses who take pleasure in tormenting their lovers. That hateful scheme was the only possible remedy for her misfortunes. So she would become the mistress of her sorrows, she would order them according to her good pleasure, and would make them less keen by reducing her husband to subjection, by forcing him under the yoke of a terrible despotism. She felt no remorse at the thought of making life hard for him. At one bound she leaped into the cold scheming of indifference to save her daughter; she suddenly divined the perfidy and falsehoods of creatures who do not love, the lures of coquetry, and the atrocious wiles that arouse such profound hatred in the heart of a woman whom men thereupon suppose to be corrupt by nature. Unknown to Julie, her vanity as a woman, her self-interest and a vague longing for vengeance, combined with her maternal love to lead her into a path where fresh sorrow awaited her. But her nature was too lovely, her mind too refined and, more than all, she was too frank, to be for long an accomplice in such fraud. Accustomed to search her own heart, at the first step in the path of vice —for this was vice—the cry of her conscience stifled the cry of the passions and of egotism. Indeed, it often happens in the case of a young woman whose heart is still pure, and who has known but one love, that the sentiment of maternity itself is subject to the voice of modesty. Is not modesty the very essence of woman? But Julie did not choose to see any risk, any sin in her new life. She

went to Madame de Sérizy's. Her rival expected to see a pale, languishing creature; the marchioness had put rouge on her cheeks and made her appearance in all the splendor of a costume that greatly enhanced her beauty.

Madame la Comtesse de Sérizy was one of those women who lay claim to a sort of empire over society and fashion in Paris; she dictated decrees which, being received in the circle in which she reigned, seemed to her to be universally adopted; she claimed the right to invent words; she was the sovereign *arbitress*. Literature, politics, men and women, all underwent her censorship; and Madame de Sérizy seemed to defy the censorship of others. Her house was in every respect a model of good taste. Amid her salons, filled with beautiful and fashionable women, Julie triumphed over the countess. Clever, quick, sprightly, she was surrounded by the most distinguished men throughout the evening. To the despair of the ladies, her toilette was beyond reproach, and everybody envied the cut of her skirt and the shape of her corsage, whose effect was generally attributed to the genius of some unknown dressmaker; for women prefer to believe in the science of putting gowns together, rather than in the grace and perfect shape of those who are so made as to carry them off well. When Julie rose to go to the piano to sing Desdemona's romanza, the men came running from all the salons to hear that famous voice, so long mute, and there was absolute silence. The marchioness was greatly excited

when she saw the heads grouped together at the doors and every eye fixed upon her. She looked about for her husband, darted at him a glance brimming over with coquetry and was overjoyed to see that his self-love was tremendously flattered. Delighted with her triumph, she enchanted the assemblage with the first part of *Al più salice*. Never had Malibran or Pasta given utterance to strains so admirable in intensity of feeling, so perfect in intonation; but as she was about to begin the second part, she saw Arthur standing in one of the groups, with his eyes fixed on her face. She started convulsively, and her voice trembled. Madame de Sérizy darted to her from her place.

"What is it, my dear? Oh! poor love, she is so ill! I trembled when I saw her undertake something so far beyond her strength."

The romanza was not finished. Julie, out of temper, did not feel the courage to continue, and had to submit to her rival's insincere sympathy. All the women whispered together, and by dint of much discussion of the incident, they divined the struggle that had begun between the marchioness and Madame de Sérizy, whom their venomous tongues did not spare. The strange presentiments that had so often agitated Julie's mind were suddenly realized. As she thought of Arthur she had taken pleasure in the thought that a man, apparently so sensitive and modest, would surely remain true to his first love. Sometimes she had flattered herself that she was the object of that laudable

passion, the pure, genuine passion of a young man, whose every thought belongs to his beloved, whose every moment is devoted to her, who knows no subterfuges, who blushes at the things that make a woman blush, thinks like a woman, gives her no rivals, and abandons himself to her without thought of ambition or glory or fortune. She had dreamed all this of Arthur in moments of insanity, of distraction; and suddenly she seemed to see that her dream had come true. She read upon the young Englishman's almost feminine face the same profound thought, the same gentle melancholy, the same sorrowful resignation, of which she was herself the victim. She recognized herself in him. Misfortune and melancholy are the most eloquent interpreters of love, and bring about a correspondence between two suffering creatures with incredible rapidity. Where they exist, insight and power of comprehension are complete and accurate. So the violence of the shock the marchioness received revealed to her all the dangers of the future. Too happy to find a pretext for her confusion in her customary ill health, she gladly allowed herself to be overwhelmed by Madame de Sérizy's ingenious compassion.

The interruption of the romanza was an event which various people discussed from different standpoints. Some deplored Julie's fate, and bewailed the loss to society of so remarkable a woman; others were anxious to find out the reason of her ill health and of her solitary life.

"Well, my dear Ronquerolles," said the marquis to Madame de Sérizy's brother, "so you envied my good luck when you saw Madame d'Aiglemont and reproached me for being unfaithful to her, eh? Nonsense! you would find my lot very little to your taste, if you should live with a pretty woman for a year or two, as I have lived with her, without daring to kiss her hand for fear of breaking it. Don't ever burden yourself with one of those delicate jewels, good for nothing but to be kept under glass, and so fragile and high-priced that we are obliged always to respect them. Do you often use your fine horse that you are so afraid to take out in the snow or heavy rain, as I am told? That's just my case. True, I am certain of my wife's virtue; but my marriage is a luxury, and if you think I am married, you are mistaken. So my infidelities are legitimate in a certain sense. I would like right well to know what you would do in my place, my worthy scoffers? Many men would have less consideration than I have for my wife. I am sure," he added in a low voice, "that Madame d'Aiglemont suspects nothing. So, most assuredly I should do very wrong to complain—I am very lucky. But, nothing is so tiresome to a sensitive man as to see a poor creature to whom he is attached suffer—"

"Are you so very sensitive, pray?" rejoined Monsieur de Ronquerolles; "you are rarely at home."

This good-natured epigram made those who heard it, laugh; but Arthur maintained his cold imperturbability, like a gentleman who has taken gravity

for the foundation of his character. The husband's strange words doubtless aroused some hope in the young Englishman's heart, and he waited patiently until he should be alone with Monsieur d'Aiglemont; an opportunity soon presented itself.

"Monsieur," said he, "it pains me beyond measure to see Madame la Marquise's condition, and if you knew that she is likely to die a lingering death, for lack of special treatment, I think you would not joke about her illness. My excuse for speaking to you thus is my certainty that I can save Madame d'Aiglemont, and restore her to life and happiness. It is not an ordinary thing for a man of my rank to be a physician; and nevertheless chance willed that I should study medicine. Now, I find life so much of a bore," he said, affecting a selfish indifference likely to serve his ends, "that it makes little difference to me whether I spend my time traveling about for the benefit of a suffering fellow-creature, or devote it to gratifying any foolish whims of my own. Diseases of this description are rarely cured, because they require much care and time and patience; above all things one must have plenty of money, must travel about, and follow scrupulously the prescribed treatment, which varies every day and is in no wise disagreeable. We are two *gentilshommes*," he said, using that word as synonymous with the English word *gentlemen*, "and we can understand each other. I tell you beforehand that, if you accept my proposition, you will be able to pass judgment on my conduct at any moment. I will undertake

JULIE AT THE PIANO

Delighted with her triumph, she enchanted the assemblage with the first part of Al più salice. *Never had Malibran or Pasta given utterance to strains so admirable in intensity of feeling, so perfect in intonation; but as she was about to begin the second part, she saw Arthur standing in one of the groups, with his eyes fixed on her face. She started convulsively, and her voice trembled. Madame de Sérizy darted to her from her place.*

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nothing without consulting you or without your supervision, and I will guarantee success if you will consent to obey me. Yes, if you will cease, for some time to come, to be Madame d'Aiglemont's husband," he whispered.

"It is certain, milord," laughed the marquis, "that no one but an Englishman could make such an extraordinary proposition. Allow me neither to accept nor reject it; I will think it over. First of all, it must be submitted to my wife."

At that moment Julie reappeared at the piano. She sang the aria, *Son regina, son guerriera*, from *Semiramide*. The enthusiasm she aroused was manifested by applause,—unanimous, but hollow, so to speak,—the polite acclamations of Faubourg Saint-Germain.

When D'Aiglemont escorted his wife home, Julie saw with a sort of uneasy pleasure the speedy success of her undertaking. Her husband, awakened by the part she had just played, chose to honor her with a passing caprice, and took a fancy to her, as he might have done to an actress. Julie thought it amusing to be treated so, she, a virtuous, married woman; she tried to play with her power, and, in this initial contest, her good-nature led her to yield once more; but it was the most terrible of all the lessons fate had in store for her. About two or three o'clock in the morning, Julie was sitting up in bed, musing dejectedly; the room was dimly lighted by a lamp and the most profound silence reigned; for an hour or more the marchioness, a

prey to poignant remorse, shed tears, whose bitterness can be understood only by women who have found themselves in the same situation. One must have a heart like Julie's to feel as she did the horror of a premeditated caress, to be so bruised by an unloving kiss; apostasy of the heart aggravated by pitiable prostitution. She despised herself, she cursed the married state, she wished she were dead; and, had not her daughter cried out, she would perhaps have thrown herself through the window into the street. Monsieur d'Aiglemont slept peacefully beside her, undisturbed by the hot tears that fell upon him from her eyes.

The next day Julie was able to assume a mask of cheerfulness. She found strength to appear happy, and to conceal, not her melancholy, but an invincible feeling of horror. From that day she ceased to look upon herself as a woman without reproach. Had she not lied to herself? thenceforth, was she not capable of dissimulation, and might she not display amazing craft in the matter of conjugal shortcomings? Her marriage was the cause of this *a priori* perversity, which as yet had had nothing to exercise itself upon. But she had already asked herself why she should resist a lover whom she loved, when she gave herself, against the promptings of her heart and against her natural instincts, to a husband she no longer loved? All sins, and crimes it may be, are based upon some false reasoning or upon excess of egoism. Society cannot exist save by the individual sacrifices that the laws

demand. If one accepts its advantages, is not that equivalent to an agreement to uphold the conditions necessary to its existence? Now, the wretched creatures who have nothing to eat and are obliged to conform to the rules of propriety, are no less to be pitied than women who are wounded in their natural yearnings and sensibility.

A few days after this scene, the secret of which was buried in the conjugal bed, D'Aiglemont presented Lord Grenville to his wife. Julie received Arthur with cold courtesy that did honor to her powers of dissimulation. She imposed silence on her heart, veiled her glances, imparted firmness to her voice, and thus remained mistress of her future. Having by these means, inbred in her sex, so to speak, discovered the full extent of the passion she had inspired, Madame d'Aiglemont smiled at the suggestion of a prospect of speedy cure, and made no opposition to her husband's emphatically expressed desire that she should accept the young doctor's services. However, she would not trust herself in Lord Grenville's hands until she had studied his words and his manner sufficiently to feel sure that he would be generous enough to suffer in silence. She had the most absolute power over him and she was abusing it already: was she not a woman?

*

Montcontour is a venerable manor-house situated upon the summit of one of the light-colored cliffs at whose base flows the Loire, not far from the spot where Julie's carriage had stopped in 1814. It is one of the pretty little white châteaux, characteristic of Touraine, with sculptured turrets, embellished with the delicate tracery of Mechlin lace,—one of the dainty, spruce châteaux that mirror their reflections in the waters of the stream, with their clumps of mulberry trees, their vines, their hidden paths, their long open-work balustrades, their cellars hollowed out of the cliff, their mantles of ivy and their sloping terraces. The roofs of Montcontour sparkle beneath the sun's rays,—the whole place is aglow with light. Innumerable hints of Spain give a poetic flavor to this charming habitation; the golden broom and bell flower perfume the air; the breeze is soft and caressing, the earth smiles all about, and all about sweet witchery steals over the heart, and makes it amorous and slothful, relaxes the tense chords and soothes its agitation. This fair and fascinating country lulls pain to sleep and awakens passion. Beneath that cloudless sky, beside those sparkling waters, no one can remain cold. There many an ambition dies; there you sink to rest upon the bosom of unruffled happiness, as the

sun sinks to rest each evening in his sheets of purple and of azure.

On a soft, balmy evening in the month of August, 1821, two persons were climbing the rocky paths that cut the cliff on which the château is perched, bending their steps toward the highest point, there doubtless to enjoy the many lovely views to be obtained. These two persons were Julie and Lord Grenville; but this Julie seemed a different woman. Her cheeks had the fresh coloring of health. Her eyes, enlivened by a life-giving force, shone through a misty vapor like that that gives a child's eyes their irresistible fascination. Her smile was expansive, she was happy to live and realized what life might be. By the way in which she lifted her dainty feet it was easy to see that no infirmity made her slightest movements dull and listless, as in the old days, nor gave an air of languor to her looks and words and gestures. Beneath the white silk parasol that sheltered her from the sun's hot rays, she resembled a young bride beneath her veil, a virgin ready to abandon herself to the enchantments of love. Arthur escorted her with a lover's solicitude, guided her as one guides a child, showed her the best places to walk, helped her to avoid the rolling stones, pointed out a vista here and there or a lovely flower, always moved by a kindly feeling, a delicacy of purpose, a perfect familiarity with his companion's tastes,—sentiments which seemed to be as natural to him, even more natural perhaps, than the necessary forethought concerning his own

existence. The invalid and her physician walked with equal steps, in no respect surprised at the harmony that seemed to have existed since the first day they had walked together; they obeyed the same will, went forward and stopped, impelled by the same sensations; their looks, their words corresponded to their mutual thoughts.

Upon coming to a vineyard, they decided to rest for a while upon one of the long white stones that are continually taken from the cliffs in the process of digging cellars; but before sitting down, Julie glanced at the landscape.

"Oh! what a lovely country!" she cried. "Let us pitch a tent and live here. Victor," she cried, "come! come!"

Monsieur d'Aiglemont replied from below with a huntsman's "tally-ho!" but did not quicken his pace; he simply looked up at his wife from time to time when the winding path permitted. Julie inhaled the fresh air with ecstasy, raising her head and bestowing upon Arthur a subtle glance of the sort by which a clever woman discloses her whole thought.

"Oh!" said she, "I would like to stay here for ever. Could one ever weary of feasting one's eyes on this lovely valley? Do you know the name of yonder pretty little stream, milord?"

"That is the Cise."

"The Cise," she repeated. "And what is that over there, in front of us?"

"The banks of the Cher," he replied.

"And off at the right? Oh! that is Tours. Just see the lovely effect of the cathedral towers in the distance!"

She relapsed into silence and allowed the hand she had held out toward the city to fall upon Arthur's hand. Together they admired in silence the landscape and the harmonious beauty of nature. The murmuring of the river, the purity of the air and sky, all were in accord with the thoughts that came rushing to their young and loving hearts.

"Ah! mon Dieu! how I love this country!" Julie repeated with increasing innocent enthusiasm. "Have you lived here long?" she asked after a pause.

At these words Lord Grenville started.

"It was over yonder," he said sadly, pointing to a clump of walnut trees on the road, "that I, a prisoner, first saw you —"

"Yes, but I was in a very depressed state then; this country seemed a perfect wilderness to me, and now—"

She paused; Lord Grenville dared not look at her.

"It is to you," said Julie at last after a long silence, "that I owe this pleasure. Must one not be alive to appreciate the joys of living, and was I not dead to everything until now? You have done more than restore me to health—you have taught me to realize all its worth—"

Women have an inimitable faculty of expressing their feelings without employing too expressive words; their eloquence lies principally in their accent, their gestures, their attitude and the expression

of their eyes. Lord Grenville hid his face in his hands, for his eyes were filled with tears. These were the first words of thanks Julie had offered him since they left Paris. For a whole year he had attended upon the marchioness with the most absolute devotion. Seconded by D'Aiglemont, he had taken her to the waters at Aix, then to the seashore at La Rochelle. Keeping close watch upon the changes, his simple but wise prescriptions had produced upon Julie's shattered constitution, he had cultivated it with the care an enthusiastic horticulturist might lavish upon a rare flower. The marchioness seemed to receive all Arthur's judicious nursing with the selfishness of a Parisian belle accustomed to homage, or with the thoughtlessness of a courtesan who has no idea of the price of things or the worth of men, and estimates their value according to their usefulness to her. The influence of localities upon the heart is a matter worthy of remark. If melancholy infallibly steals over us when we are near the water, there is another law of an impressible nature that causes our sentiments to assume a purer tone among the mountains; there, passion gains in depth what it seems to lose in vivacity. The view of the vast basin of the Loire, the elevation of the miniature mountain where the two lovers were seated, caused perhaps the delicious atmosphere of tranquillity in which they first tasted the happiness one feels upon divining the extent of a passion hidden beneath words of seeming insignificance. As Julie finished the sentence that had so deeply moved Lord

Grenville, a soft breeze moved the tops of the trees and filled the air with the fresh odors from the river; a wandering cloud obscured the sun, and the soft shadows brought out all the beauties of the lovely scene. Julie turned her head away to hide from the young nobleman the traces of the tears she succeeded in forcing back and drying, for Arthur's emotion had quickly infected her. She dared not look into his face for fear he might detect too much joy in her eyes. Her womanly instinct told her that at such a perilous moment she must bury her love at the bottom of her heart. And yet silence might be no less redoubtable. When she saw that Lord Grenville was unable to utter a word, Julie began in a soft voice:

"You are touched by what I said, milord. Perhaps this sudden overflow of feeling is the method adopted by a generous, kindly heart like yours to retract a false judgment. You thought me ungrateful when I seemed to you cold and reserved or thoughtless and insensible during our travels, which happily are so soon to come to an end. I should not have been worthy to receive your attentions had I not been capable of appreciating them. Milord, I have forgotten nothing. Alas! I shall forget nothing—neither the solicitude that led you to watch over me as a mother watches over her child, nor above all else the generous confidence of our fraternal intercourse, the delicacy of your conduct; against these forms of seduction we are without defensive weapons. Milord, it is beyond my power to make up to you—"

At that point Julie moved swiftly away, and Lord Grenville made no movement to detain her; the marchioness walked to a large stone a short distance away, and stood motionless there; their emotions were a secret even to themselves, doubtless they were weeping in silence; the singing of the birds, always so light of heart and so lavish of loving expressions at sunset, was well adapted to increase the violent internal commotion that had forced them to separate; nature undertook the duty of giving expression to a love of which they dared not speak.

"Well, milord," continued Julie, standing before him in a dignified attitude which permitted her to take his hand, "I will ask you to make the life you have restored to me pure and holy. We will part here. I know," she added, as she saw the color leave Lord Grenville's cheeks, "that, as the reward of your devotion, I am going to demand of you a sacrifice even greater than those previous ones for which I should have shown myself more grateful. —But it must be.—You must not remain in France. By issuing orders to you thus, do I not give you rights which I must look upon as sacred?" she added, placing the young man's hand upon her fast-beating heart.

"Yes," said Arthur, rising to his feet.

As he spoke he pointed to D'Aiglemont, who made his appearance on the other side of a wooded road, on the balustrade of the château, with his daughter in his arms. He had climbed up there to amuse little Hélène.

"Julie, I won't speak to you of my love, for our hearts understand each other too well. However deeply hidden, however secret my heart's joys have been, you have shared them all. I feel it, I know it, I see it. Now, I possess the delicious certainty of the never-failing sympathy between our hearts, but I will fly.—I have already given too much thought to the various ways of killing that man to be able to resist forever, if I should stay with you."

"I have had the same thought," she said, with an expression of pained surprise upon her troubled features.

But there was such consciousness of virtue, such absolute certainty of herself, and a suggestion of so many victories over importunate love in Julie's accent and gesture, that Lord Grenville was struck dumb with admiration. The very shadow of sin faded away in that innocent conscience. The religious sentiment that held sway upon that lovely brow would always drive away the involuntary evil thought which our imperfect nature engenders, and which demonstrates at once the grandeur and the perils of our destiny.

"In that case, I should have incurred your contempt and that thought would have saved me," she continued, lowering her eyes. "Would it not be like death to forfeit your esteem?"

These two heroic lovers were silent for another brief space, devouring their suffering; good or bad, their thoughts were alike faithful, and their understanding was as perfect in relation to their most

carefully concealed sorrows as to their secret pleasures.

"I ought not to complain, the misery of my life is my own work," said she, raising her eyes, streaming with tears, to heaven.

"Milord," cried the general, waving his hand from his elevated position, "this is where we first met. Perhaps you don't remember? It was down yonder by those walnut trees."

The Englishman replied with an abrupt nod.

"I am fated to die young and unhappy," said Julie. "Oh! don't think that I shall live. Sorrow will be quite as fatal as the terrible disease of which you have cured me could be. I do not think I am to be blamed. No, the attachment I have formed for you is irresistible, everlasting, but altogether involuntary, and I propose to remain a virtuous woman. However, I shall be faithful to my conscience as a wife, to my duties as a mother, and to the yearning of my heart. Listen to what I say," she said in an altered voice; "I will never again belong to that man, never!"

And with a gesture of horror and resolution terrible to see, Julie pointed to her husband.

"The laws of society," she continued, "demand that I should make his life happy, and I will obey them; I will be his servant; my devotion to him will know no bounds, but from this day I am a widow. I will not be a harlot in my own eyes or in those of society; if I do not belong to Monsieur d'Aiglemont I will belong to no other man. You

shall have nothing from me save what you have extorted from me. That is the decree I have pronounced against myself," she said, looking proudly at Arthur. "It is irrevocable, milord. And now, understand that, if you yield to a criminal thought, Monsieur d'Aiglemont's widow will enter a cloister, either in Italy or in Spain. Fate willed that we should speak of our love. These avowals were inevitable, perhaps; but let this be the last time that our hearts beat so violently. To-morrow you will pretend to receive a letter which calls you back to England, and we will part, never to meet again."

Exhausted by the effort she had made, Julie felt her knees giving way beneath her, a deathlike chill ran through her veins, and, in obedience to a truly feminine impulse, she sat down to avoid falling into Arthur's arms.

"Julie!" cried Lord Grenville.

This piercing shriek echoed like a peal of thunder; a heartrending outcry that expressed all that the lover, thus far mute, had been unable to say.

"Well, well, what's the matter with her?" cried the general, who had quickened his pace when he heard the cry and suddenly appeared in front of the lovers.

"It's nothing at all," said Julie with the marvelous presence of mind which the natural craft of women often places at their disposal in the great crises of life. "The overpowering odor from this walnut tree very nearly made me lose consciousness, and my doctor must have shuddered with alarm.

What am I in his eyes but an unfinished work of art? He may have trembled at the thought of seeing it destroyed—"

She boldly took Lord Grenville's arm, smiled at her husband, glanced at the view before leaving the brow of the cliff and led her traveling companion away, taking his hand in her own.

"Really, this is the loveliest view we have seen yet," said she; "I shall never forget it. Look, Victor, how far we can see; how extensive the view is and how varied! This country gives me an idea of what love might be."

Laughing almost convulsively, but in a way to mislead her husband, she plunged gayly into the wooded path and disappeared.

"What! so soon?" she said, when they had left Monsieur d'Aiglemont far behind. "What! my friend, a moment more and we can no longer be and shall never again be ourselves, in fact we shall cease to live—"

"Let us walk slowly," replied Lord Grenville, "the carriages are still a long way off. We will walk along together, and if we are permitted to put words into our glances our hearts will live a moment longer."

They walked along the levée, on the river brink, in the last rays of the setting sun, almost silently, saying a few vague words, soft as the murmuring of the Loire, but with the power of stirring the heart to its depths. The sun, as it was about to sink below the horizon, enveloped them in a flood of red light

before disappearing, a depressing image of their fatal passion. Much disturbed at not finding his carriage at the spot where they had left it, the general followed them or went on before without taking part in the conversation. The noble and delicate conduct of Lord Grenville during the journey had put the marquis' suspicions to flight, and for some time past he had left his wife free, trusting to the punic faith of the nobleman-doctor. Arthur and Julie walked on, their bruised hearts in sad and sorrowful accord. But lately, as they climbed the slopes of Montcontour, they had both felt a vague hope, a resistless happiness which they dared not analyze; but as they went down together by the levée they had overturned the frail edifice upon which they dared not breathe, like children who fear the downfall of the cardhouses they have built. They were without hope.

That same evening Lord Grenville took his leave of them. The last glance he bestowed upon Julie unhappily made it plain that since their sympathy had disclosed to them the extent of their ardent passion, he had had reason to lose confidence in himself.

When Monsieur d'Aiglemont and his wife were seated on the back seat of their carriage the next day, without their late traveling companion, and were driving swiftly along the road traversed once before in 1814, by the marchioness, who was then entirely ignorant of love and had almost cursed the idea of constancy, a thousand forgotten impressions

came rushing back to her mind. The heart has its own memory. A woman who is utterly incapable of recalling the most important events, will remember all her life things that affect her sentiments. So Julie remembered perfectly well many of the most trivial details; she recalled with a feeling of delight the slightest incidents of her first journey, even to the thoughts that had come to her mind at certain points on the road. Victor, who had fallen passionately in love with his wife once more since she had recovered the fresh bloom of youth and all her beauty, pressed her to his side after the fashion of lovers. When he tried to take her in his arms she gently extricated herself and invented some pretext or other to avoid that harmless caress. Soon she began to loathe Victor's touch, although she felt and shared his emotion caused by the way they were sitting. She wished to sit alone on the front seat; but her husband was gallant enough to leave the back seat at her disposal. She thanked him for the attention with a sigh that he misunderstood, and the old-time garrison Don Juan construed his wife's melancholy to his own advantage, so that, toward the end of the day, she was compelled to speak to him with a degree of firmness that made a deep impression upon him.

"My dear," she said, "you have already come within an ace of killing me; you know that. If I were still an inexperienced girl, I might begin anew the sacrifice of my life; but I am a mother, I have a daughter to bring up, and I owe myself to her as

much as to you. Let us submit to an unfortunate state of things which weighs upon us both alike. You are less to be pitied than I. Haven't you succeeded in finding such consolation as my duty, our common honor, and—more than all else—nature, make impossible for me? See," she added, "you carelessly left three letters from Madame de Sérizy in a drawer; here they are. Doesn't my silence prove to you that you have in me an indulgent wife, who does not demand from you the sacrifices to which the laws condemn her? but I have reflected enough to know that our rôles are not the same and that the wife alone is predestined to unhappiness. My virtue rests upon fixed, unchanging principles. I shall not fail to lead an irreproachable life; but let me live."

The marquis, abashed by the logic that women are quick to learn by the bright light of love, was subjugated by the dignity that comes natural to them in such crises. The instinctive repulsion that Julie manifested for everything that wounded her love and the aspirations of her heart is one of the loveliest traits in woman, and proceeds from an innate virtue upon which neither law nor civilization can impose silence. But who would dare to blame the woman? When they have imposed silence upon the sentiment which forbids them to belong to two men at once, are they not like priests without faith? If some rigid creatures blame the sort of bargain made by Julie between her duty and her love, other passionate hearts will impute it to her as a crime.

This general reprobation is proof positive of the misery that attends upon disobedience to the law, or else it points to very deplorable imperfections in the institutions upon which European society rests.

*

Two years passed, during which Monsieur and Madame d'Aiglemont led the life of society people, each going his or her own way, and meeting in others' salons more frequently than in their own house; a fashionable sort of divorce by which many marriages in high life end. One evening, by an extraordinary chance, the husband and wife found themselves together in their own salon. Madame d'Aiglemont had had a friend of her own sex to dinner, and the general, who almost invariably dined out, had remained at home.

"You are very lucky, Madame la Marquise," said Monsieur d'Aiglemont as he placed his empty coffee-cup upon a table.

He glanced at Madame Wimphen with a half-malicious, half-vexed expression, and added:

"I am going off on a long hunting expedition with the grand huntsman. You will be absolutely a widow for at least a week, and that's what you want, I fancy—Guillaume," he said to the servant who came to remove the cups, "order the horses."

Madame de Wimphen was the Louisa upon whom Madame d'Aiglemont once attempted to urge the expediency of celibacy. The two women exchanged a significant glance which proved that Julie had

found in her friend a confidante of her woes,—a precious, charitable confidante,—for Madame de Wimphen was very happy in her marriage; and, in the strongly contrasted positions they occupied, perhaps the happiness of the one was a guaranty of her devotion to the other in her misery. In such cases, the dissimilarity of destinies is almost always a strong bond of friendship.

"Is this the hunting season?" Julie said with an indifferent glance at her husband.

It was the end of March.

"Madame, the grand huntsman hunts when and where he chooses. We are going to the royal preserves to kill wild boars."

"Take care that nothing happens to you—"

"Accidents are always unexpected," he replied with a smile.

"Monsieur's carriage is ready," said Guillaume.

The general rose, kissed Madame de Wimphen's hand, and turned to Julie.

"Madame, suppose I should fall a victim to a wild boar?—" he said with a suppliant air.

"What does that mean?" asked Madame de Wimphen.

"Come here," said Madame d'Aiglemont to Victor.

She smiled, as if to say to Louisa: "You will see."

Julie put out her neck to her husband, who walked up to her to kiss her; but she bent her head so far that the conjugal caress grazed the ruffle of her *pèlerine*.

"You will be my witness before God," rejoined the marquis, addressing Madame de Wimphen, "that I need a firman to obtain even this slight favor. That is my wife's idea of love. She has brought me round to it by some artifice or other.—Much pleasure to you!"

And he left the room.

"Why your poor husband is really very kind to you," cried Louisa, when the two women were left alone. "He loves you."

"Oh! don't say another syllable. The very name I bear fills me with loathing."

"That may be, but Victor obeys you implicitly," said Louisa.

"His obedience," Julie replied, "is based in part upon the great esteem I have inspired in him. I am a very virtuous woman, in the eyes of the law; I make his house pleasant for him, I close my eyes to his intrigues, I don't encroach upon his fortune; he can squander his income as he pleases; I simply take care that the capital is kept intact. At that price I am left in peace. He doesn't understand, or doesn't choose to understand my life. But although I lead my husband as you see, I am not without apprehension as to the effects of his character. I am like a bear-leader who trembles for fear that the muzzle will break some day. If Victor thought that he was entitled to withdraw his esteem from me, I don't dare think of what might happen; for he is very violent and overflowing with self-esteem and with vanity above everything. If his

wit is not keen enough to enable him to act judiciously in a delicate crisis where his evil passions are brought into play, his is a weak character, and he would kill me provisionally, to die of grief perhaps the next day. But such fatal good-fortune is not to be feared—"

There was silence for a moment, while the minds of the two friends reverted to the secret cause of the existing condition of affairs.

"I have been obeyed with cruel scrupulousness," continued Julie, with a meaning glance at Louisa. "But I didn't forbid *him* to write to me. Ah! *he* has forgotten, and he was right. It would be far too great a pity that his whole life should be ruined! isn't mine enough? Would you believe, my dear, that I read the English newspapers, solely in the hope of seeing his name mentioned. He hasn't yet appeared in the House of Lords."

"Pray, do you know English?"

"Didn't I tell you?—I have learned it."

"Poor darling," cried Louisa, seizing Julie's hand, "how can you live?"

"That's a secret," replied the marchioness, with a gesture almost childlike in its innocent frankness. "Listen. I take opium. The story of the Duchess of ——, in London, gave me the idea. You know, Mathurin has made a novel of it. My laudanum drops are very weak. I sleep a great deal. I am only awake about seven hours and those I give to my daughter."

Louisa stared at the fire, not daring to look at her

friend, whose whole misery was laid bare to her eyes for the first time.

"Louisa, keep my secret," said Julie after a moment's silence.

At that moment a servant brought her a letter.

"Ah!" she cried, turning pale.

"I won't ask from whom it comes," said Madame de Wimphen.

The marchioness read, and heard nothing more; her friend saw traces of the most intense excitement, the most dangerous agitation upon Madame d'Aiglemont's face, as she turned pale and red and pale again in rapid succession. At last she tossed the letter into the fire.

"It's an incendiary letter! Oh! my heart is choking me."

She rose and paced up and down the room; her eyes were on fire.

"He hasn't left Paris!" she cried.

Her fitful speech, which Madame de Wimphen dared not interrupt, was broken by alarming pauses. After every interruption, the next words were uttered with more and more pronounced emphasis. The last words were something terrible.

"He hasn't ceased to see me, unknown to me. A glance from me, caught on the wing every day, makes it possible for him to live. Think of it, Louisa, he is dying, and wants to say adieu to me; he knows that my husband has gone away to-night for several days, and he is coming in a moment. Oh! I shall die. I am lost. Come, stay with me.

Before two women, he won't dare! Oh! stay; I am afraid of myself."

"But my husband knows that I dined with you," replied Madame de Wimphen, "and he is to come here for me."

"Well, I shall have sent him away before you go. I will act as executioner for both of us. Alas! he will think I have ceased to love him. And that letter! My dear, it contained sentences that I can see now written in lines of fire."

A carriage stopped at the door.

"Ah!" cried the marchioness with a sort of joy, "he comes publicly and without mystery.

"Lord Grenville!" cried the servant.

The marchioness remained where she stood, motionless as a statue. When she saw how pale and thin and haggard Arthur was, severity was out of the question. Although he was bitterly disappointed not to find Julie alone, he seemed calm and cold. But, to those two women who had been initiated in the mysteries of his love, his countenance, the tone of his voice, the expression of his eyes had something of the power attributed to the crampfish. The marchioness and Madame de Wimphen seemed benumbed by the sudden contagion of horrible suffering. The sound of Lord Grenville's voice made Madame d'Aiglemont's heart beat so violently that she dared not reply to him for fear of betraying the extent of his power over her; Lord Grenville dared not look at Julie, so that Madame de Wimphen bore almost the entire burden of a

prosaic conversation. By a glance overflowing with touching gratitude, Julie thanked her for her assistance. Thereupon the lovers imposed silence upon their feelings and struggled to hold themselves within the limits prescribed by duty and propriety. But soon Monsieur de Wimphen was announced; as he entered the room the two friends exchanged glances, and understood, without a word, the fresh complications of the situation. It was impossible to admit Monsieur de Wimphen to the secret of the drama, and Louisa had no plausible reason to give her husband for asking him to remain at her friend's house. When Madame de Wimphen was putting on her shawl, Julie rose as if to assist her, and said in an undertone:

"I shall have courage. As long as he came here openly, what need I fear? But except for you I should have fallen at his feet at first, when I saw how changed he was.—Well, Arthur, you didn't obey me," she said in a trembling voice, as she resumed her seat upon a couch, where Lord Grenville dared not join her.

"I could resist no longer the pleasure of hearing your voice, of being near you. It was rank madness, delirium on my part. I am no longer master of myself. I have studied my own condition and I am too weak. I must die. But to die without seeing you, without hearing the rustling of your dress, without catching your tears as they fall—what a death!"

He turned as if to walk away from her, but his

abrupt movement caused a pistol to fall from his pocket. The marchioness looked at the weapon with an eye from which all passion and power of thought had vanished. Lord Grenville picked up the pistol and seemed intensely annoyed by an accident which might be looked upon as a lover's speculation.

"Arthur?" said Julie.

"Madame," he replied lowering his eyes, "I came here in despair, I intended—"

He paused.

"You intended to kill yourself in my house!" she cried.

"Not alone," he said in a low voice.

"What! my husband, perhaps?"

"No, no!" he cried in a choking voice. "But have no fear," he continued, "my fatal project has vanished. When I came in, when I saw you, then I felt that I had the courage to hold my peace and to die alone."

Julie rose and threw herself into Arthur's arms, and through his mistress' sobs he distinguished these passionate words:

"To know true happiness, and die—" she said. "Ah, yes!"

Julie's whole story was told in that cry of solemn meaning, the cry of nature and of love to which women without religious feeling succumb; Arthur seized her and bore her to a couch with an impulsive movement accompanied by the violence that unhoped-for happiness arouses. But suddenly the

marchioness tore herself from her lover's arms, looked him in the face with the fixed stare of a woman in despair, took him by the hand, seized a candle and led him into her bedroom; when they had reached the bed where Hélène lay sleeping, she gently put aside the curtains and disclosed her child, placing one hand in front of the candle so that the light should not fall upon the little creature's transparent, hardly-closed lids. Hélène's arms were thrown apart and she was smiling in her sleep. With a glance Julie called Lord Grenville's attention to the child. That glance said everything.

"We may abandon a husband even if he loves us. A man is a strong creature and has ways of consoling himself. We can despise the laws of society. But a motherless child!"

These and a thousand other, even more touching thoughts were in that glance.

"We can take her away," murmured the Englishman; "I would love her dearly.—"

"Mamma!" said Hélène, waking up.

At this word Julie burst into tears. Lord Grenville sat down and folded his arms, mute and dejected.

"Mamma!" That sweet, innocent interruption awoke so many noble sentiments, such a flood of irresistible sympathies, that love was for a moment drowned by the powerful voice of maternity. Julie was no longer a woman, she was a mother. Lord Grenville did not long resist; her tears subdued him.

At that moment a door was violently thrown open

with a great noise, and the words: "Are you here, Madame d'Aiglemont?" echoed like a thunderclap in the hearts of the two lovers. The marquis had returned. Before Julie could recover her self-possession the general passed through his chamber on his way to hers. The two rooms adjoined each other. Luckily, Julie thought to make a sign to Lord Grenville who darted into a closet, whereupon the marchioness hastily turned the key upon him.

"Well, my dear, here I am," said Victor. "The hunting party didn't come off. I am going to bed."

"Good-night," said she, "I am going to do the same. So let me undress, please."

"You are very cruel to-night. I obey you, Madame la Marquise."

The general returned to his room; Julie accompanied him as far as the door, closed it and rushed back to set Lord Grenville free. Her presence of mind returned and it occurred to her that there was nothing strange about her former doctor paying her a visit; she might have left him in the salon while she was putting her child to bed, and she was about to tell him to go thither without making a noise; but when she opened the closet door she uttered a piercing shriek. Lord Grenville's fingers were caught and crushed in the groove.

"Well, what's the matter?" her husband called out.

"Nothing, nothing," she replied, "I just ran a pin into my finger."

The door between the rooms was suddenly thrown

open. The marchioness supposed that her husband was coming out of concern for her, and cursed his solicitude in which the heart had no part. She had barely time to close the closet door, and Lord Grenville had not been able to extricate his hand. The general appeared; but the marchioness was mistaken; his motive in coming was anxiety on his own account.

"Can you lend me a silk handkerchief? That rascal Charles leaves me without a single nightcap. In the early days of our married life you looked after my affairs so carefully that you bored me with them. Ah! the honeymoon didn't last long for me—nor for my cravats. Now, I am given over to the secular arm of these people, all of whom make sport of me."

"See, here's a handkerchief. You haven't been to the salon?"

"No."

"If you had you might have found Lord Grenville there."

"Is he in Paris?"

"Apparently."

"Oh! I'll go and see him—the dear doctor—"

"He must have gone before now!" cried Julie.

The marquis was standing at this moment in the middle of his wife's chamber, tying the silk handkerchief about his head, and viewing himself complacently in the mirror.

"I don't know where our people are," said he. "I have rung for Charles three times already and

he hasn't come. Isn't your maid about? Ring for her; I would like an extra coverlid on my bed to-night."

"Pauline has gone out," replied the marchioness, shortly.

"At midnight!" said the general.

"I gave her leave to go to the Opéra."

"That's strange!" rejoined the husband, beginning to undress, "I thought I saw her going upstairs."

"Then she has returned, no doubt," said Julie, with an affectation of impatience; in order to arouse no suspicion in her husband's mind, she rang the bell, but very feebly.

The events of that night have never been accurately known; but they were in all probability as simple, as horrible as were the commonplace domestic incidents we have described. The next day, the Marquise d'Aiglemont took to her bed, and remained there several days.

"What extraordinary thing has happened at your house, to set everybody talking about your wife?" Monsieur de Ronquerolles asked Monsieur d'Aiglemont some days after that night of catastrophes.

"Take my advice and remain a bachelor," said D'Aiglemont. "The curtains of Hélène's bed took fire; my wife had such a shock that the doctor says she is laid up for a year. You marry a pretty woman, she grows plain; you marry a strong, healthy girl, she becomes a malingerer; you think her passionate, she turns out to be cold; or else,

while she is apparently cold, she is really so passionate that she kills you or disgraces you. Sometimes the mildest creature turns crotchety, but the crotchety ones never turn mild; sometimes the weak, foolish child you have nourished develops an iron will and the wit of a demon. I am tired of marriage."

"Or of your wife."

"That would be hard. By the way, will you come to Saint-Thomas d'Aquin with me to Lord Grenville's funeral?"

"That's a strange pastime. Tell me," continued Ronquerolles, "do they know certainly what caused his death?"

"His servant declares that he stayed a whole night on the outer sill of a window to save his mistress's honor; and it has been devilish cold lately!"

"Such devotion would be very estimable in us old stagers; but Lord Grenville was young and—an Englishman. Those English fellows always want to make themselves conspicuous."

"Bah!" retorted D'Aiglemont, "such heroic freaks depend on the woman who inspires them, and certainly poor Arthur didn't die on my wife's account!"

Untold Suffering

*

Between the small stream called the Loing and the Seine stretches a vast plain bordered by the forest of Fontainebleau, and by the towns of Moret, Nemours and Montereau. In this arid region hills are of rare occurrence; here and there, in the midst of the fields, is a small patch of woodland, which serves as a covert for game, and on all sides the endless gray or yellowish lines peculiar to the horizons of Sologne, Beauce and Berri. In the centre of this level tract, between Moret and Montereau, the traveler spies an old château called Saint-Lange, whose surroundings lack neither grandeur nor majesty. There are avenues of magnificent elms, moats, long walls, immense gardens —and huge seignorial structures, which must have required, for the building, the profits derived from unjust taxation, from farming the revenues and from authorized peculation, or one of the great aristocratic fortunes destroyed by the hammer of the Civil Code. If the artist or the dreamer goes astray by chance in the rutty roads or the rough fields that defend the approaches to this region, he wonders by what caprice that poetic château was dropped in that prairie of grain, that desert of chalk and clay

and sand, where gayety dies, where melancholy inevitably is born, where the soul is incessantly wearied by the monotony of a voiceless solitude, by the unbroken horizon—negative beauties, but well adapted to the sorrow that seeks no consolation.

A young woman, renowned at Paris for her grace, her beauty and her wit, whose social position and fortune were in harmony with her celebrity, came to Saint-Lange toward the end of the year 1821, and took up her abode there, to the vast astonishment of the little village about a mile away. The farmers and peasants had not known of the château being inhabited within living memory. Although it yielded considerable revenue, the estate was left in charge of a manager and kept up by old servants. So it was that the advent of Madame la Marquise caused considerable excitement in the vicinity. Several persons were standing in a group in the outskirts of the village street, in the courtyard of a wretched inn at the junction of the roads to Nemours and Moret, to watch the arrival of a calèche moving at a slow pace, for the marchioness had brought her own horses from Paris. Upon the front seat sat the maid holding a little girl of thoughtful rather than merry aspect. The mother was lying back in the carriage like a dying woman sent into the country by the doctors. The young woman's delicate, dejected countenance gave but little satisfaction to the village politicians who had hoped that her arrival at Saint-Lange would be the signal for some sort of awakening in the community.

It was very evident that anything of that nature would be most distasteful to that grief-stricken creature.

The wisest head in the village of Saint-Lange declared that evening, in the common room at the wine shop, where the notables were drinking together, that, judging from the settled melancholy of Madame la Marquise's face, she must be ruined. In the absence of Monsieur le Marquis, who was to accompany the Duc d'Angoulême to Spain, so the newspapers said, she had come to Saint-Lange to save the amount necessary to settle the deficiencies arising from certain unlucky speculations on the Bourse. The marquis was one of the wildest of gamblers. Perhaps the estate would be sold in small lots. There would be a good chance for bargains in that case. They must all be thinking about taking their crowns out of their hiding places, counting them over and taking stock of their resources, in order to have each his part in the holocaust of Saint-Lange. This view of the future was so attractive that every notable, impatient to know if it was well founded, sought some means of finding out the truth through the servants at the château; but not one of them could give any information as to the catastrophe that brought their mistress, at the beginning of winter, to the old château of Saint-Lange, when she possessed other estates famous for their cheerful surroundings and beautiful gardens. Monsieur le Maire called to offer his respects to madame, but was not admitted. After

the mayor, the manager of the estate presented himself with no better success.

Madame la Marquise did not leave her room, except to allow it to be put to rights, when she would repair to a small salon adjoining, where she dined, if it can be called dining to take one's seat at the table, glance with loathing at the dishes placed before one, and take just the necessary amount of food to avoid death by starvation. Then she would return at once to the old-fashioned couch on which she sat from morning till night, in the recess of the window that lighted her bedroom. She saw her daughter only during the few moments employed by her melancholy repast, and even then seemed to endure her presence with difficulty. Could anything less than immeasurable suffering impose silence on the maternal sentiment in a young woman's heart? None of her servants were admitted to her presence. Her maid was the only person whose services were agreeable to her. She required absolute silence in the château and her daughter had to go beyond her hearing to play. It was so hard for her to endure the slightest sound, that any human voice, even her child's, affected her disagreeably. The country people were much exercised over her peculiarities; but, when all possible suppositions were exhausted, the peasants and the inhabitants of the small neighboring towns ceased to think of the invalid.

So the marchioness was left to herself, and was enabled to live a life of perfect seclusion amid the silence she had enforced all about her, and she had

no occasion to leave the tapestried chamber where her grandmother died, and to which she had come to die peacefully, without annoyance, without being compelled to undergo the false demonstrations of selfishness glossed over with affection, which increase twofold the agony of death, in cities. She was twenty-six years old. At that age, a heart still filled with poetic illusions, loves to taste death, when it seems a blessing. But death plays the coquette with young people; for them it advances and withdraws; its slothful movement disenchants them with it, and the uncertainty as to what comes after finally casts them back into the world, where they encounter sorrow, which, less pitiful than death, strikes them without delay. Now, this woman, who refused to live, was destined to experience the bitterness of death's procrastination in the depths of her solitude, and, in mental agony that death would not end, to serve a terrible apprenticeship to selfishness, which was to pervert her heart and mould it over to suit the requirements of the world.

That cruel, bitter lesson is always the result of our first sorrow. The marchioness really suffered for the first and perhaps the only time in her life. Would it not, indeed, be a mistake to think that one's sentiments are ever re-created? When they have once come into being, do they not always exist in the depths of the heart? They are lulled to sleep and awake again at the good pleasure of the accidents of life; but they are always there, and their presence necessarily exerts an influence upon the

heart. And so every sentiment has but one great day—the day, longer or shorter as the case may be, of its first tempest. And so sorrow, the most constant of our sentiments, is really keen only at its first outbreak; and its subsequent attacks grow weaker and weaker, either because we become accustomed to its paroxysms, or because of some law of our nature, which, to keep itself alive, opposes to that destructive force an equal but inert force, found in the devices of selfishness. But to which one among all the forms of suffering shall this name of sorrow be applied? The loss of relatives is a grief for which nature has prepared mankind; physical pain is temporary, does not touch the heart; and if it persists it ceases to be pain and becomes death. Let a young woman lose a new-born babe, her husband's love has soon given her another to take its place. That affliction also is temporary. In a word, the ills we have mentioned and many other similar ones are, in a certain sense, blows, wounds; but no one of them affects life in its essence, and they must follow upon one another in unusually rapid succession to kill the sentiment that leads us to seek happiness. The great, the genuine sorrow, then, must be caused by some blow deadly enough to blot out in the same moment past, present and future, to leave no element of life untouched, to pervert the mind forever, to make its mark ineffaceably upon the lips and brow, to break or distend the springs of enjoyment by planting in the heart a feeling of disgust for everything on earth. Again,

to have its full effect, to weigh thus on the body and the heart alike, the blow must fall at a time of life when all the bodily and mental forces are young and vigorous, and strike down a quick, living heart. In such case the blow makes a deep wound; great is the suffering, and no mortal can recover from its effects without some radical poetic change: either he takes the road to heaven, or, if he tarries here on earth, he returns to the world to lie to the world, to play a part there; he knows the secrets of the wings to which men retire to scheme and weep and jest. After that momentous crisis there are no more mysteries for him in social life, upon which his judgment is irrevocably passed. In a young woman of the marchioness's age, this first and most poignant of all sorrows always results from the same cause. A woman, especially a young woman, as noteworthy for her mental qualities as for her beauty, never fails to lead the life that nature, sentiment and society unite in impelling her to lead. If that life turns out a failure and she remains on earth, she experiences the most cruel suffering, for the same reason that makes the first love the most beautiful of all sentiments. Why has this form of misery never had its painter or its poet? But can it be painted, can it be sung? No, the nature of the sorrows it engenders does not lend itself to analysis or to the colors of art. Moreover, those sorrows have never been put into words; to console a woman so afflicted one must be able to divine them; for, being always stored away with scrupulous exactness and bitter

resentment in the memory, they lie hidden in the mind, as an avalanche, rushing down into a valley, levels everything in its way to make room for itself.

The marchioness at this time was afflicted by such suffering as this, which remains long unknown because everybody in society frowns upon it; whereas sentiment smiles upon it and the conscience of a true woman justifies her in it. It is the same with such suffering as with children who are necessarily shut out from all enjoyment of life, and have a stronger hold upon their mother's heart than children more happily endowed. Never, perhaps, had the horrible catastrophe that kills all our interest in life fallen upon anyone with such crushing, hopeless force as upon the marchioness. A man she dearly loved, young and generous, whose desires she had never gratified out of respect for the laws of society, had died to save for her what society calls *a woman's honor.* To whom could she say: "I am suffering!" Her tears would have offended her husband, the proximate cause of the catastrophe. Morality and law alike forbade her lamentations; a friend of her own sex would have reveled in them, a man would have speculated upon them. No, the poor afflicted creature could weep at her ease only in a desert, there to devour her grief or be devoured by it, to die or kill something within her, mayhap her conscience. For some days she sat with her eyes fixed upon a flat, unbroken horizon, where, as in her future, there was nothing to look for, nothing to hope for, where everything could

be seen at a single glance, and where her eye recognized the image of the dull desolation that tore her heart incessantly. The morning mists, the overcast sky, clouds scudding near the earth beneath a canopy of gray, were suited to the phases of her moral malady. She had no sense of oppression at her heart, nor was her heart withered in any sense; no, her fresh, blooming nature was petrified by the slow action of intolerable grief,—intolerable because it had no end. She suffered in herself and for herself. To suffer thus is to take the first step in egoism, is it not? And so, horrible thoughts passed through her mind and wounded her conscience. She questioned herself in good faith and found that her personality was twofold. There was in her a woman who reasoned and a woman who felt, a woman who suffered and a woman who wished to suffer no more. Her mind went back to the joys of her childhood days, which passed without appreciation of their happiness; and now memories of that peaceful time came crowding upon her as if to emphasize the mockery of a marriage, admirable in the eyes of the world, horrible in reality. What had the sweet modesty of her girlhood availed her, her victories over temptation, or the sacrifices she had made to society? Although everything about her seemed to speak of love and ask for love, of what use now, she asked herself, were her grace of movement, her smile and her power of fascination? She no more liked to feel that she was fresh and lovely than one likes to hear a sound repeated again and

again. Her very beauty was intolerable to her as a useless thing. She realized with horror that she could no longer be a complete creature. Had not her inner *I* lost the faculty of enjoying the delicious impression of novelty that adds so much zest to life? In the future, most of her sensations would be effaced as soon as received, and many of those which had once moved her would become indifferent to her. After the infancy of the creature comes the infancy of the heart. That second infancy her lover had carried with him to the tomb. Still youthful so far as her desires were concerned, she had no longer that absolute youthfulness of heart which imparts a value and a savor to everything in life. Would she not always have in her heart a strain of melancholy, of distrust which would deprive her emotions of their sudden freshness, their enthusiasm? for nothing could give her back the happiness she had hoped for and had seen in such glowing colors in her dreams. Her first genuine tears extinguished the celestial fire that sheds light upon the first emotions of the heart; she must always suffer because she was not what she might have been. From that belief proceeded the bitter loathing that made her turn her head when pleasure presented itself anew. She looked upon life then with the eyes of an aged man ready to leave it. Although she was conscious of the vigor of youth, the burden of her joyless days fell heavily upon her heart and crushed it, and made her old before her time. She asked the world, with a shriek of despair, what it had to give her in

exchange for the love that had made life possible for her and that she had lost. She asked herself if, in her vanished love, chaste and spotless as it was, her thoughts had not been more guilty than her acts. She accused herself without stint, to insult society and to console herself for not having had with him she mourned, that perfect understanding, which, by placing two hearts in touch with each other, allays the sorrow of the one left behind by the certainty of having enjoyed perfect happiness, of having been able to bestow the like, and of retaining undimmed forever the image of the one that has gone. She was discontented, too, like an actress who has failed to obtain a coveted rôle, for her misery assailed all her fibres, heart and head alike. If nature had hurt her by foiling her dearest hopes, her vanity also was wounded no less than the kindness of heart that leads a woman to sacrifice herself. And then, too, by propounding all sorts of questions to herself, by working all the springs that keep in motion the different forms of existence that social, moral and physical nature offer us, she so thoroughly relaxed her mental faculties that, amid a throng of contradictory reflections, she could lay hold of nothing. And so sometimes, when the mist settled down upon the fields, she would open her window and stand, without power of thought, mechanically inhaling the damp, earthy odor with which the air was laden, motionless, an idiot to all appearance, for the buzzing of her sorrows in her ear made her deaf alike to the harmonious sounds of nature and the charms of thought.

*

One day, about noon, just as the sun had driven away the clouds, the marchioness's maid entered her room, without a summons, and said:

"This is the fourth time that Monsieur le Curé has called to see Madame la Marquise; and he is so persistent to-day that we don't know what to say to him."

"He has come, no doubt, to get money for the poor of the village; take twenty-five louis and give them to him from me."

"Madame," said the maid, returning a moment later, "Monsieur le Curé refuses to take the money and wishes to speak with you."

"Let him come then!" replied the marchioness, with a gesture of annoyance that augured ill for the priest's reception, as it was evident that she proposed to avoid his persecution in future by a brief and outspoken explanation.

The marchioness had lost her mother when she was very young, and her education was naturally affected by the prevailing laxity that loosened the bonds of religion in France during the Revolution. Piety is a female virtue which only women transmit to any extent, and the marchioness was a child of the eighteenth century, whose philosophic beliefs were adopted by her father. She followed no religious ceremonial. In her eyes, a priest was a

public functionary whose usefulness was not beyond dispute. In her present situation, the voice of religion could only envenom her suffering; furthermore, she had but little faith in village curés or their learning; she resolved therefore to teach this one of her own to know his place, without harshness, and to rid herself of him after the fashion of the wealthy, by opening her purse.

The curé came and his appearance did not change the marchioness's ideas. She saw a little stout man with a protruding paunch, and a ruddy, but old and wrinkled face, who tried to smile, but with ill success; his hairless skull, furrowed by numerous transverse wrinkles, overhung his face and dwarfed it; a few white hairs adorned the lower part of his head above the nape of his neck and extended forward toward his ears. Nevertheless, his features were those of a man of a naturally jovial disposition. His thick lips, his slightly turned-up nose, his chin which disappeared in a mass of wrinkles, bore witness to a happy temperament. At first sight, the marchioness saw only these prominent features; but at the first words the priest said she looked at him more closely, and noticed that beneath his grizzled eyebrows were eyes that had wept; the contour of his cheeks, too, seen in profile, gave to his face such an imposing expression of sorrow, that the marchioness conceived that she had found a man in this priest.

"Madame la Marquise, the rich come within our jurisdiction only when they suffer; the sufferings

of a married woman, young and rich and beautiful, who has lost neither children nor parents, are easily guessed,—they are caused by wounds whose ache can be allayed only by religion. Your soul is in danger, madame. I am not speaking at this moment of the other life that awaits us! No, I am not in the confessional. But is it not my duty to enlighten you as to the future of your social existence? You will, I trust, forgive an old man an intrusion which has no other object than your happiness."

"Happiness, monsieur, is not for me. I shall belong to you soon, as you say, but it will be forever."

"No, madame, you will not die of the sorrow that is crushing you and can be read in your features. If you were destined to die of it, you would not be at Saint-Lange. We are less likely to die from the effects of certain regret than from the effects of unfulfilled hopes. I have known of grief more heart-rending, more intolerable than yours, that has not caused death."

The marchioness made an incredulous gesture.

"Madame, I know a man whose suffering has been so great that your grief would seem a mere trifle when compared to his—"

Whether because her long solitude was beginning to pall upon her, or because she was attracted by the prospect of being able to pour out her painful thoughts into a friendly heart, she looked at the curé with a questioning expression that it was impossible to misunderstand.

"Madame," the priest resumed, "the man I speak of was a father who had but three children remaining of a once numerous family. He had lost his parents, and then in quick succession a daughter and a wife, both dearly loved. He was left alone, upon a little estate in a distant province, where he had long lived happily. His three sons were in the army, each holding a rank proportioned to the length of time he had served. During the Hundred Days, the oldest joined the guards and became a colonel; the second was a major of artillery, and the youngest a major of dragoons. Madame, those children loved their father as dearly as he loved them. If you knew the reckless natures of those young men, whose passions so engrossed them that they had no time to give to family affections, you would understand from a single fact the depth of their love for a poor, lonely old man who lived only in them and for them. Not a week passed that he did not receive a letter from one of them. But he had never been weakly indulgent to them, a failing that diminishes a child's respect; nor had he hurt them by undue severity, nor repelled them by being over-greedy of sacrifices on their part. No, he had been more than a father, he had been their brother, their friend. At last he went to Paris to bid them adieu on the eve of their departure for Belgium; he must see that they had good horses, that they lacked nothing. When they had gone, the father returned home. The war began; he received letters from Fleurus, from Ligny, and all went well. The battle of Waterloo

was fought, you know the result. All France was put into mourning at a single blow. Every family was plunged into the most painful anxiety. He, madame, you understand, could do naught but wait; he had neither rest nor respite; he read the gazettes, he went every day to the post himself. One evening, the servant of his son the colonel arrived. He was riding his master's horse, so there was no need to ask any questions; the colonel was dead, cut in two by a cannon-ball. Toward the end of the evening the youngest son's servant arrived on foot; the youngest had died the day after the battle. Lastly, at midnight, an artilleryman came and announced the death of the last child, upon whose head the poor father had rested all his hope for those few hours. Yes, madame, they had all fallen!"

After a pause the priest, having overcome his emotion, added these words in a gentle voice:

"And the father has lived on, madame. He understood that, since God had left him upon earth, he must continue to live and suffer here, and he is suffering; but he has sought comfort in the bosom of religion. What could he do?"

The marchioness raised her eyes to the curé's face, a sublime picture of melancholy resignation, and waited for the words, which brought tears to her eyes:

"Become a priest, madame: he was consecrated by tears before being consecrated at the altar's foot."

Silence reigned for a moment. The marchioness

and the curé looked through the window at the misty horizon, as if they could see there those who were no longer on earth.

"Not a city priest, but a simple curé," he continued.

"At Saint-Lange," she said, wiping her eyes.

"Yes, madame."

Never had the majesty of grief appeared more sublime to Julie; and that *Yes, madame,* fell upon her heart with the weight of an infinite sorrow. The voice that rang so softly in her ears moved her to the lowest depths of her nature. Ah! it was the voice of grief, the resonant, grave voice that seems to teem with penetrating fluid.

"Monsieur," said the marchioness almost respectfully, "if I do not die, what will become of me?"

"Have you not a child, madame?"

"Yes," said she, coldly.

The curé glanced at her in the way a doctor glances at a dangerously sick patient, and determined to do his utmost to rescue her from the genius of evil whose hand was already stretched out over her.

"As you see, madame, we must live with our sorrows, and religion alone offers us real consolation. Will you permit me to come again so that you may hear the voice of a man who knows how to sympathize with all forms of suffering, and about whom there is nothing repulsive, I trust?"

"Yes, monsieur, come. I thank you for having thought of me."

THE CURÉ OF SAINT-LANGE CALLS UPON JULIE

After a pause, the priest, having overcome his emotion, added these words in a gentle voice:

"And the father has lived on, madame. He understood that, since God had left him upon earth, he must continue to live and suffer here, and he is suffering; but he has sought comfort in the bosom of religion."

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"Well, madame, I shall see you soon."

This visit relaxed, so to speak, the tension of the marchioness's heart; her faculties had been too rudely shaken by grief and solitude. The priest left a balsamic perfume in her heart with the salutary echo of his devout words. Then she felt that sort of satisfaction which gladdens the prisoner, when, having come to realize his absolute solitude and the weight of his fetters, he falls in with a neighbor who strikes upon the wall, making it give forth a sound by which they can express their thoughts. She had an unhoped-for confidant. But she soon fell back into her habit of bitter meditation, and said to herself, like the prisoner, that a companion in affliction would not lighten her bonds or make her future brighter. The curé did not choose to give too rude a shock to a wholly selfish sorrow at his first visit; but he hoped, by virtue of his art, to be able to advance the cause of religion at a second interview. Two days later he came again, and the warmth of the marchioness's greeting proved that his visit was desired.

"Well, Madame la Marquise," said the old man, "have you reflected upon the vast sum of human suffering? have you raised your eyes to heaven? have you gazed upon that immensity of worlds which, by diminishing our importance and crushing our vanity, lessens the poignancy of our grief?"

"No, monsieur," said she. "The laws of society weigh so heavily upon me and oppress me so bitterly that I cannot raise myself heavenward. But the

laws perhaps are less cruel than the customs of society. Oh! society!"

"We must obey both alike, madame: the law is the word, and the customs are the acts of society."

"Obey society?"—rejoined the marchioness with a horrified gesture. "Ah! monsieur, all our woes come from society. God never made a single law of misery; but men, by combining, have perverted His work. We women are more maltreated by civilization than we should be by nature. Nature imposes upon us physical suffering which you have not allayed, and civilization has developed sentiments which you constantly outrage. Nature stifles feeble creatures, but you condemn them to live in order to expose them to never-ending misery. Marriage, the institution upon which society rests to-day, requires us to carry its whole weight; to man liberty, to woman, duty. We owe you our whole lives, you owe us only a few scattered moments of yours. And man makes his choice where we simply submit blindly. Oh! monsieur, I can speak freely to you. Marriage, as it is carried on to-day, seems to me nothing less than legalized prostitution. That is the source of all my unhappiness. But I alone, among all the wretched creatures under the fatal yoke, have no right to complain! I alone am the author of my misery, for my marriage was my own act."

She stopped, wept bitterly and was silent.

"In this profound misery, in the midst of this ocean of sorrow," she continued after a pause, "I

had found a few grains of sand upon which I could rest my feet, so that I could suffer at my ease; but a tempest swept them all away. And here I am, alone, without support, too weak to withstand the storms of life."

"We are never weak when God is with us," said the priest. "And even if you have no affections to satisfy here on earth, have you no duties to fulfil?"

"Duty, always duty!" she cried with something like impatience. "Pray where am I to find the sentiments that give us the strength to accomplish our duty? Monsieur, nothing from nothing or nothing for nothing is one of the justest laws of nature and morals and physics. Would you expect these trees to produce their foliage without the sap that gives them life? The heart has its sap too! In my case, the sap is dried up at its source."

"I will say nothing of the religious sentiments that engender resignation," said the curé; "but is not maternity, madame—"

"Stop, monsieur!" said the marchioness. "With you, I will be frank. Alas! henceforth I can be so with no one else; I am condemned to double dealing; the world demands constant grimacing, and orders us, under pain of disgrace, to conform to its conventions. There are two forms of maternity, monsieur. Formerly I knew nothing of such distinctions; to-day, I know. I am but half a mother and it would be better if I were not so at all. Hélène is not *his!* Oh! do not shudder! Saint-Lange is an abyss in which many false sentiments are swallowed

up, where the frail edifices of unnatural laws have crumbled to pieces, and from which come ominous gleams. I have a child, that is enough; I am a mother, the law will have it so. But you, monsieur, who have such delicacy of feeling and such a sympathetic heart, will perhaps understand the cries of a poor woman who has allowed no sham sentiment to find its way into her heart. God will be my judge, but I do not think I have broken His laws by yielding to the affections He has implanted in my heart, and this is what I have found there. A child, monsieur, is the image of two beings, is he not, the fruit of two sentiments freely mingled? If he be not intertwined with all the fibres of the body as with all the affections of the heart; if he do not recall blissful moments, the times and places where those two beings were happy together, and their language overflowing with human music, and their sweet communion of ideas, that child is an abortive creature. Yes, for them he should be a ravishing miniature wherein the poem of their secret double life is reproduced; he should be to them a never-failing source of emotion, their whole past and their whole future at one and the same time. My poor little Hélène is her father's child, the child of duty and of chance; she finds in me only the wifely instinct, the law that irresistibly impels us to protect the creature born of our flesh. I am irreproachable, socially speaking. Did I not sacrifice my life and my happiness to her? Her cries move my very bowels; if she should fall into the water, I would

jump in to save her. But she is not in my heart. Ah! love made me dream of a grander, more complete maternity; in a dream that has vanished I have caressed the child that desire conceived before it was engendered, the delicious flower born in the heart before it is born to the light. I am to Hélène all that a mother ought to be to her children in the natural order of things. When she has no further need of me, that will be the end of it; when the cause is extinct, the effects will cease. If woman possesses the adorable privilege of prolonging her maternity over her child's whole life, must we not attribute this divine persistence of the maternal sentiment to the radiation of her moral conception? When the child has not had its mother's heart for its first envelope, the maternal sentiment ceases as it ceases in animals. That is true, for I feel it; as my poor little one grows, my heart closes more and more. The sacrifices I have made for her have already separated me from her, while for another child my heart, I am sure, would have been inexhaustible; for that other, nothing would have been a sacrifice, everything would have been a pleasure. In this matter, monsieur, reason, religion, everything within me is powerless against my sentiments. Is it sinful for a woman to wish to die, who is neither wife nor mother, and who, to her undoing, has caught a glimpse of love in all its infinitude of beauty, in all its boundless joy? What can become of her? I will tell you what such a woman feels! A hundred times during the day, a

hundred times during the night, a shudder runs through my head and my heart and my body, when some memory, too feebly fought against, brings me the image of a happiness which I conceive as greater than it is. In face of these cruel fancies my sentiments fade away, and I say to myself: 'What would my life have been, *if—?*' "

She hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"I have shown you my whole heart!" she continued. "A child by him would have made it possible for me to accept with resignation the most horrible misery! The Saviour who died laden with all the sins of the world will forgive me for the thought, which is death to me; but the world is implacable, I know; in its eyes, my words are blasphemous; I outrage all its laws. Ah! I would like to make war on this vile world, in order to make over its laws and customs, to shatter them! Has it not wounded me in every fibre, in all my thoughts, in all my sentiments, in all my desires, in all my hopes, in the past, in the present, in the future? For me the day is full of shadows, thought is a sword, my heart is a gaping wound, my child a negation. Yes, when Hélène speaks to me, I wish that she had another voice; when she looks at me, I wish that she had other eyes. She is a living witness of all that ought to be and is not. I cannot endure her! I smile at her, I try to make up to her for the sentiments I steal from her. I suffer! oh! monsieur, I suffer too keenly to support life. And I shall be

looked upon as a virtuous woman! I have committed no sin! I shall be honored! I struggled against the involuntary love to which I ought not to yield, but even though I have kept my faith, physically speaking, have I preserved my heart? This," she said, pressing her hand against her bosom, "has belonged to only one human being. So, you see, my child is not mistaken. There are mothers whose glance and voice and gestures have the power to mould their children's hearts; but my poor little one never feels my arms tremble, my voice falter, my eyes grow soft, when I lift her up, or speak to her, or look at her. She casts reproachful glances at me which I cannot meet! Sometimes I tremble lest I find in her a tribunal before which I shall be condemned unheard. May Heaven grant that hatred do not some day come between us! Great God! rather let the grave open for me and let me end my days at Saint-Lange! I long to go to the world where I shall meet my other self again, where I shall be a mother in good truth! Oh! pardon me, monsieur, I am mad. These words were suffocating me and I have said them. Ah! you are weeping too! you will not despise me.—Hélène, Hélène, come here, my child!" she cried, in a sort of desperation, hearing her daughter returning from her walk.

The little girl came in laughing and crying with delight; she had a butterfly that she had caught; but when she saw her mother in tears, she held her peace, went and stood beside her and allowed herself to be kissed on the forehead.

"She will be very lovely," said the priest.

"She is her father all over," replied the marchioness, kissing her daughter with a display of warmth, as if to acquit herself of a debt or to quiet a feeling of remorse.

"You're warm, mamma."

"Go, leave us, my angel," said the marchioness.

The child went away with no indication of regret, without looking at her mother, almost happy, apparently, to escape from a sad face, and realizing already that the sentiments expressed thereon were inimical to her. The smile is the appanage, the tongue, the expression of maternity. The marchioness could not smile. She blushed as she looked at the priest; she had hoped to show herself a mother, but neither she nor her child could lie. The kisses of a sincere woman bear a celestial honey that seems to endow them with a soul, with a subtle fire that penetrates the heart. Kisses that have not that honeyed sweetness are dry and bitter. The priest was conscious of the difference; he could sound the depth of the chasm that lies between maternity of the flesh and maternity of the heart. And so with a searching glance at the woman before him, he said:

"You are right, madame; it would be better for you to be dead—"

"Ah! I see that you understand my sufferings," she replied, "since you, a Christian priest, divine and approve the sad resolutions they have inspired. Yes, I have longed to kill myself; but I have lacked

the necessary courage to carry out my purpose. My body has been cowardly when my heart was strong, and when my hand ceased to tremble, my heart faltered! I do not know the secret of these struggles and this vacillation. I am a real woman, to my sorrow—a woman without strength of will, strong only to love. I despise myself! At night when my servants were asleep, I would go most courageously to the pond; when I reached the shore, my weak nature would turn sick at the thought of destruction. I confess my weaknesses to you. When I was in bed once more, I would be ashamed of myself and my courage would return. At one of those times I took laudanum; but I suffered only—I did not die. I intended to take all the bottle contained, but I stopped at half."

"You are lost, madame," said the curé gravely, and in a voice choking with sobs. "You will return to society, and you will deceive society; you will seek and find there what you consider a compensation for your woes; then some day you will feel the burden of your pleasures—"

"I," she cried, "abandon to the first villain who knows how to play the comedy of passion, the last, the most precious treasures of my heart, and pollute my whole life for a moment of doubtful pleasure? No! my heart will be consumed by a pure flame. Monsieur, all men have the passions of their sex; but the man who has its heart and thus satisfies all the demands of our nature, whose sweet harmony is never marred except under the pressure of emotion,

such a man is not met with twice in our lives. My future is horrible to contemplate, I know; a woman is nothing without love, beauty is nothing without pleasure; but would not the world blame me for being happy if happiness should ever again be mine? I owe my daughter an honored mother. Ah! I am in the centre of a circle of fire from which I cannot escape without ignominy. Family duties, performed without hope of reward, will weary me; I shall curse life; but my daughter shall at least have a fair semblance of a mother. I will bestow treasures of virtue upon her, to take the place of the treasures of affection of which I have defrauded her. I do not even care to live for the purpose of tasting the joy that mothers feel in the happiness of their children. I do not believe in happiness. What will be Hélène's fate? The same as mine, no doubt. What means has a mother of assuring her daughter that the man to whom she gives her will be a husband after her own heart? You point the finger of scorn at poor creatures who sell themselves for a few crowns to the first comer; hunger and necessity excuse such ephemeral unions; while society tolerates, nay, encourages the much more deplorable union of an innocent young girl and a man she has not known three months; she is sold for her whole life. To be sure, the price is high! If, as you permit her to have no compensation for her suffering, you would only respect her; but no, society slanders the most virtuous of us! Such is our destiny, looked at in its two aspects: public prostitution and shame, private

prostitution and unhappiness. As for the poor girls without *dot*, they go mad and die; no pity for them! Beauty, virtue, have no value in your human bazaar, and you call that den of selfishness society! Better disinherit women altogether! in that way you would at least obey a law of nature by choosing your companions, and marrying them in accordance with the dictates of your hearts."

"Madame, your words prove that neither the family spirit, nor the religious spirit appeals to you. Therefore you will not hesitate between the social selfishness that wounds your sensibilities, and the animal selfishness that will lead you to crave physical enjoyment—"

"Is there such a thing as family, monsieur? I deny that such a thing exists, under a social régime, which, at the death of the father or mother, divides the property and bids each child go his own way. The family is a temporary, fortuitous association, speedily dissolved by death. Our laws have destroyed families, inheritances, and the permanence of examples and traditions. I see only ruins around me."

"Madame, you will not return to God, until His hand weighs heavily upon you, and I trust that you will have time enough to make your peace with Him. You seek consolation by keeping your eyes fixed upon the earth, instead of raising them to Heaven. The philosophical spirit and self-interest have attacked your heart; you are deaf to the voice of religion like all the children of this unbelieving

age! The pleasures of the world engender naught but suffering. You are about to change one form of misery for another, that's all."

"I shall prove your prophecy to be false," said she, smiling bitterly; "I shall be faithful to him who died for me."

"Sorrow can exist," he replied, "only in the hearts prepared therefor by religion."

He respectfully lowered his eyes in order to conceal the doubts that might be expressed therein. The energetic lamentations of the marchioness had saddened him. Recognizing the human *ego* in all its thousand forms, he despaired of softening that heart which misfortune had withered instead of expanding, and in which the seed sown by the Divine Sower could not take root, because his gentle voice was drowned by the loud and awful clamor of egoism. Nevertheless, he displayed the constancy of the apostle and repeated his visit several times, always brought back by the hope of turning that proud and noble heart to God; but he lost courage the day that he discovered that the marchioness liked to talk with him only because it was pleasant to her to speak of him who was no more. He did not choose to degrade his ministry by becoming the confidant of a passion; he ceased to talk seriously with her and reverted gradually to the stereotyped commonplaces of conversation. The spring came. The marchioness found means of diverting her thoughts from her profound melancholy, and occupied her leisure in the care of her estate, amusing

herself by ordering some improvements. In October, she left the old château of Saint-Lange, where she had become lovely and blooming once more in the idleness of a sorrow which was at the outset as violent as the motion of a quoit thrown by a strong arm, but had finally died away to gentle melancholy, as the oscillations of the quoit become gradually weaker and weaker until it stops. Melancholy consists of a series of similar mental oscillations, the first of which borders upon despair, and the last is akin to pleasure: in youth, it is the morning twilight; in old age, the dusk of evening.

When her calèche passed through the village, the marchioness received the salutation of the curé, who was returning from the church to his vicarage; but, after replying to it, she lowered her eyes and turned her head in order not to see him again. The priest was too nearly accurate in his judgment of this poor Diana of the Ephesians.

At Thirty Years

*

A young man, of exalted hopes, belonging to one of the historic houses whose names will always, even despite the laws, be closely interwoven with the glories of France, attended a dancing party at Madame Firmiani's. That lady had given him letters of introduction to two or three of her friends at Naples. Monsieur Charles de Vandenesse—such was the young man's name—had come to thank her and to take leave of her. Having filled several diplomatic posts with distinction, Vandenesse had recently been appointed attaché to one of our ministers plenipotentiary to the Congress of Laybach, and desired to avail himself of the opportunity to study Italy. This entertainment, therefore, was a sort of farewell to the dissipations of Paris, to the swift-flowing life, the vortex of thoughts and pleasures which are often spoken slightingly of, but to which it is so delightful to abandon one's self. As he had become accustomed, by his experiences of the past three years, to make his bow in European capitals and to turn his back upon them at the bidding of the caprice of his diplomatic destiny, Charles de Vandenesse had little to regret on leaving Paris. Women had ceased to produce any impression upon

him, whether because he considered that a genuine passion occupied too much of a diplomat's life, or because the wretched trifling of superficial gallantry seemed to him too unmeaning for strong minds. All of us make great pretensions to strength of mind. In France no man, however mediocre his talent, is content to be considered simply clever. And so Charles, young though he was—barely thirty—had already philosophically accustomed himself to see ideas, results, methods, where men of his age usually see sensations, pleasures, illusions. He forced back the natural ardor and exaltation of youth into the deep recesses of his heart, which nature had created in a generous mould. He labored to make himself a cold and calculating schemer; to display in an attractive exterior, in manner and in the wiles of seduction, the treasures of intellect that he owed to chance: truly an ambitious man's task; a pitiful rôle, undertaken with the object of attaining what we call to-day *a fine position.*

He cast a last glance into the salons where dancing was in progress. Before leaving the ball, he desired, doubtless, to impress its image upon his memory, as a spectator never leaves his box at the Opéra without a glance at the final tableau. But, in obedience to a fancy easily understood, Monsieur de Vandenesse studied the purely French animation, the brilliancy and the smiling faces of this Parisian festivity, contrasting them by anticipation in his mind with the new faces and the picturesque scenes that awaited him at Naples, where he proposed to

pass a few days before going on to his post. He seemed to be comparing France, the ever-changing, France that can be studied so readily, with a country whose territory and manners were known to him only by contradictory reports, or through books that were for the most part wretchedly written. Certain reflections, not unpoetic, but very commonplace in these days, passed through his mind, and answered, unknown to him it may be, the secret longings of his heart, which was out of occupation rather than withered, particular in its requirements rather than *blasé*.

"Here," he said to himself, "are the most fashionable, the noblest, the richest women in Paris. Here are the celebrities of the day, renowned orators, renowned aristocrats and men of letters: artists on this side, ministers on the other. And yet I see nothing but petty intrigues, stillborn love affairs, smiles that say nothing, disdain without cause, lustreless glances, abundant wit, but all expended to no purpose. All these pink and white faces are in quest of distraction rather than enjoyment. No emotion is genuine. If you care simply for well-arranged feathers, fresh muslins, pretty costumes, frail women; if life in your eyes is simply a surface to be skimmed over, this is where you belong. Be content with these unmeaning phrases, these charming grimaces, and seek not for sentiment in the hearts of these people. For my own part, I have a horror of all this tedious intriguing, which ends in marriages, sub-prefectures or receiver-generalships,

or, if love is concerned, in secret arrangement, everyone is so ashamed of the slightest semblance of passion. I fail to see a single one of those eloquent countenances which denote a mind abandoned to an idea as to remorse. Here regret or unhappiness conceals itself shamefacedly beneath a jest. I see none of those women with whom one would like to contend, and who draw you on into an abyss. Where can one find energy in Paris? A dagger is a curiosity that is kept hanging on a gilded nail, and is embellished with a pretty sheath. Women, ideas, sentiments, all resemble one another. Passions no longer exist because individuality has disappeared. Ranks, intellects, fortunes have been reduced to the same level, and we are all wearing black coats as if we intended to put on mourning for dead France. We are not fond of our equals. Between two lovers there must be discrepancies to be effaced, gaps to be filled. The charm of love vanished in 1789! Our weariness, our insipid manners are the result of our political system. In Italy everything is high-flavored at all events. Women are still wicked creatures there, dangerous sirens, unreasoning, guided by no other logic than that of their inclinations and appetites, and to be distrusted as one distrusts tigers—"

Madame Firmiani suddenly interrupted this monologue of vague, incomplete, contradictory, untranslatable thoughts. The charm of a reverie consists entirely in its indefiniteness;—is it not a sort of intellectual vapor?

"I want to introduce you to a lady who has the greatest desire to know you because of all that she has heard about you," she said, taking his arm.

She led him into an adjoining salon, where she pointed out to him with a gesture, a smile and a glance truly Parisian, a woman sitting at one corner of the fireplace.

"Who is she?" demanded the Comte de Vandenesse eagerly.

"A woman whom you have undoubtedly talked about more than once, to praise her or to speak ill of her,—a woman who lives alone—a downright mystery."

"If you have ever been kind in your life, I pray you, tell me her name."

"The Marquise d'Aiglemont."

"I am going to take lessons from her; she has succeeded in making a peer of France out of a husband of very moderate parts, a capable politician out of an absolute nobody. But, tell me, do you believe Lord Grenville died for her sake, as some women claim?"

"Perhaps. Since that adventure, true or false, the poor woman has changed a great deal. She hasn't gone into society yet. Constancy for four whole years is a remarkable thing in Paris. Her reason for coming here—"

Madame Firmiani checked herself; then she added, slyly:

"I forgot that I was to say nothing. Go and talk with her."

Charles stood for a moment without moving, his back resting lightly against the door frame, busily engaged in examining a woman who had become famous without anybody's being able to explain upon what her celebrity was based. Society affords many such curious anomalies. Madame d'Aiglemont's reputation was assuredly no more extraordinary than that of certain men who are always in travail with a work that nobody sees: statisticians supposed to possess vast knowledge on the faith of investigations whose results they are careful not to publish; politicians who live upon an article in a newspaper; authors or artists whose work always remains in their portfolio; men who are scholars in the eyes of those who know nothing of science, as Sganarelle is a profound Latinist to those who do not know Latin; men who are accredited with recognized capacity in a single direction, artistic it may be, or diplomatic. That admirable phrase: *It is his specialty*, seems to have been invented for these political or literary *acephala*. Charles stood there absorbed in contemplation longer than he intended, and was displeased to find his mind so taken up with a woman; but that woman's presence was in itself a refutation of the thoughts the young diplomatist had conceived a moment before as he looked on at the ball.

The marchioness, at this time about thirty years old, was a lovely woman, although her figure was frail and her appearance excessively delicate. Her greatest charm was due to a face whose tranquillity

betrayed marvelous depth of mind. Her eyes were full of sparkle, but seemed veiled by constant thought, betokening an agitated life and the most perfect resignation. Her eyelids were almost always modestly cast down toward the ground, and were seldom raised. If she happened to glance about her it was with a sad expression, and you would have said that she reserved the fire of her eyes for her secret meditations. Thus it was that every man of superior mind felt curiously drawn toward this sweet, silent creature. If the mind sought to divine the mysteries of the perpetual reaction that was taking place within her, from the present to the past, from society to solitude, the heart was no less interested in fathoming the secrets of a heart that was in a certain sense proud of its suffering. Moreover, there was nothing about her to give the lie to the ideas she inspired at first. Like almost all women who have very long hair, she was pale and perfectly white. Her skin, which was incomparably fine,—a token that rarely misleads, —denoted genuine sensitiveness, confirmed by the character of her features, which had the marvelous finish that the Chinese painters give their fanciful faces. Her neck was a little long, perhaps; but that sort of neck is the most graceful and imparts to a woman's head a vague affinity with the magnetic undulations of the serpent. If there did not exist a single one of the thousand indications by which the most cleverly dissembled natures reveal themselves to the observer, it would be enough for him to study

carefully the motions of the head and the curving of the neck, varied and expressive as they are, to judge a woman's character. In Madame d'Aiglemont's case, the costume was in harmony with the train of thought that dominated her actions. The heavy braids of hair formed a high crown upon her head, and no ornament ever appeared among them, for she seemed to have said farewell forever to the refinements of the toilet. In like manner, she was never detected in any of the little coquettish wiles that spoil so many women. But, modest as her corsage always was, it did not wholly conceal the elegance of her figure. Then, too, the beauty of her long dress consisted in its extremely distinguished cut; and, if it is permissible to seek ideas in the arrangement of a dress fabric, we might say that the numerous and simple folds of her dress imparted an air of great nobility to her bearing. And yet, perhaps, she gave token of woman's indelible weakness in the extreme care that she took of her hands and feet; but, although she took some pleasure in showing them, it would have been hard for the most malicious rival to accuse her movements of affectation, they seemed so entirely involuntary, or due to habits contracted in childhood. This remnant of coquetry obtained its own forgiveness by virtue of her charming nonchalance of manner. This collection of features, this assortment of trifles which make a woman ugly or pretty, attractive or disagreeable, can only be indicated, especially when, as was the case with Madame d'Aiglemont, the heart

is the bond that connects all the details and makes them into a charming whole. Her manner was in perfect accord with the character of her face and her costume. Until they reach a certain age, many of the noblest women do not learn to make their attitude speak. Is it sorrow or is it happiness that makes known to the woman of thirty, be she happy or unhappy, the secret of the eloquent countenance? That will always be a living enigma, which everyone will interpret at the bidding of his desires, his hopes or his theories. The manner in which the marchioness rested her elbows on the arms of her chair and joined the finger ends of her two hands as if in play; the curve of her neck, the languor of her fatigued but supple body, which seemed to have collapsed in a well-bred way in her chair, the unstudied position of her legs, the careless indifference of her attitude, her weary movements, all pointed to her as a woman without interest in life, who had not known the pleasures of love but had dreamed of them, and who was bending beneath the burdens with which her memory overwhelmed her; a woman who had long ago given up all hope of the future or of herself, a woman without occupation who mistook the emptiness of life for extinction. Charles de Vandenesse admired the magnificent picture, but he admired it as the product of a more skilful *touch* than that of most women. He knew D'Aiglemont. At the first glance at his wife whom he had not before seen, the young diplomatist at once detected a lack of proportion, an incompatibility—let us use

the legal term—between the two, too great to admit the possibility of the marchioness loving her husband. And yet Madame d'Aiglemont's conduct was absolutely irreproachable, and her virtue imparted a still greater value to all the mysteries an observer might forecast in her. When his first feeling of surprise had passed away, Vandenesse reflected upon the best way of approaching Madame d'Aiglemont, and, resorting to a stratagem very common in diplomacy, he determined to embarrass her in order to ascertain how she would receive a foolish remark.

"Madame," said he, taking a seat beside her, "thanks to a lucky slip of the tongue I have discovered that I have the good fortune, through what merit of my own I do not know, to be selected for distinction by you. I am the more indebted to you therefor, because I have never been the recipient of a similar favor. So you will be responsible for one of my failings. Henceforth I do not propose to be modest—"

"You will be ill-advised, monsieur," she said laughingly; "you must leave vanity to those who have nothing else to put forward."

A conversation thereupon ensued between the marchioness and the young man, who, as the custom was, attacked in a moment a multitude of subjects: painting, music, literature, politics, men, events and things. At last they arrived by insensible degrees at the everlasting subject of conversation in France and in foreign lands,—love, the sentiments and womankind.

"We are slaves."

"You are queens."

The more or less clever and intellectual remarks of Charles and the marchioness might be condensed into that simple summary of all conversations present and to come upon that subject. Do not those two sentences always come to mean within a given time:

"Love me."

"I will love you."

"Madame," Charles de Vandenesse exclaimed tenderly, "you make me regret deeply that I have to leave Paris. Certainly I shall pass no such improving hours in Italy as this has been."

"You will find happiness there perhaps, monsieur, and it is worth more than all the brilliant thoughts, true or false, that are put into words every evening in Paris."

Before taking leave of the marchioness, Charles obtained permission to call and pay his respects before leaving Paris. He esteemed himself very fortunate in having preferred his request with every outward appearance of sincerity, when he found, upon going to bed that night, as well as throughout the whole of the next day, that it was impossible for him to drive the woman from his mind. Sometimes he asked himself why the marchioness had distinguished him; what her intentions could have been in requesting an introduction; and he exhausted his powers of conjecture thereupon. Sometimes he fancied that he had discovered the motives

of her curiosity; at such times he became intoxicated with hope, or his ardor abated, according to the interpretation he placed upon that polite request, of such frequent occurrence in Paris. Sometimes it was everything, sometimes it was nothing. At last, he determined to resist the force that impelled him toward Madame d'Aiglemont; but he went to her house. There are such things as thoughts which we obey without knowing that we have them: they come to our minds unknown to us. Although this reflection may seem more paradoxical than true, everyone who considers it in good faith will find a thousand proofs of it in his life. In calling upon the marchioness, Charles obeyed one of those pre-existing texts of which our experience and the conquests of our intellect are, at a later period, simply the visible developments. A woman of thirty has an irresistible attraction for a young man; nothing is more natural, more firmly knit, or more certainly pre-ordained, than the profound attachments of which we see so many examples in society between a young wife like the marchioness and a young man like Vandenesse. An unmarried girl has too many illusions, is too inexperienced, and her sex is too much of an accomplice in her love, for a young man to feel flattered thereby; while a wife knows the whole story of the sacrifices to be made. Where the one is impelled by curiosity, by fascinations unconnected with those of love, the other obeys a conscientious sentiment. One yields, the other chooses. Is not the mere choice a most flattering

thing? Armed with knowledge that has almost always been dearly bought by unhappiness, the woman of experience seems, when she gives herself, to give more than herself; while the young girl, ignorant and credulous, knowing nothing at all, is unable to make any comparisons or to appreciate anything at its true value; she accepts love and studies it. The one teaches us, advises us at an age when we love to submit to guidance, when obedience is a pleasure; the other wants to learn everything and is artless where the other is affectionate. The one offers you but a single triumph, the other compels you to wage perpetual combats. The first has only tears and pleasure, the second has ecstasy and remorse. For a young girl to be really your mistress she must be too corrupt, and in that case you turn your back on her in horror; while a married woman has a thousand ways of preserving her power and her dignity at once. The one, too submissive, offers you the depressing security of repose; the other loses too much not to require love to assume its thousand changing aspects. The one dishonors herself alone, the other destroys an entire family for your benefit. The young girl knows but one resource of coquetry and thinks that all is said when she has laid aside her clothing; but the married woman has them at her command without number and conceals them beneath innumerable veils; in short, she caresses every form of vanity, and the novice flatters but one. Moreover, you have constantly to deal with indecision, fear, dread,

anxiety, outbursts of emotion, on the part of the woman of thirty, none of which are ever met with in the love of a maiden. When she has reached that age, the wife requests a young man to restore the esteem she has sacrificed to him; she lives only for him, busies herself about his future, desires to make his life glorious, and ordains that it shall be; she obeys, she implores and commands, humbles and exalts herself, and knows how to comfort him in countless emergencies, where the girl can do naught but groan. Lastly, over and above all the advantages of her position, the woman of thirty can make herself a young girl, can play all parts, be modest if she please, and deck herself out even with a disaster. Between them is the immeasurable interval that separates the foreseen from the unforeseen, strength from weakness. The woman of thirty satisfies every craving, and the young girl should satisfy none, or she is not a young girl at all. These ideas develop in a young man's heart, and go to form the most powerful of passions therein, for it combines the factitious sentiments inspired by custom with the real sentiments of nature.

The most important and most decisive step in a woman's life is the one that a woman always deems the most insignificant. Once married, she no longer belongs to herself, she is the queen and the slave of the domestic fireside. The sanctity of woman is incompatible with the duties and liberties of society. To emancipate women is to corrupt them. By granting to a stranger the privilege of entering the

sanctuary, do we not put it at his mercy? but for a woman to entice him thither is a transgression, or, to be exact, the beginning of a transgression, is it not? We must accept this theory in all its rigor or absolve the passions from blame. Up to the present time, society in France has succeeded in adopting a *mezzo termine;* it makes sport of conjugal disasters. Like the Spartans who punished lack of skill only, it seems to look kindly upon theft. But, perhaps, that system is a very judicious one. General contempt constitutes the most horrible of all punishments, in that it strikes the woman to the heart. Women set great store, and rightly too, upon being held in honor, for they cannot live without esteem; therefore it is the first sentiment they demand of love. The most corrupt of them insists, first of all, upon absolution for the past, when she sells her future, and she tries to make her lover understand that she is exchanging the honor that society will deny her for irresistible felicity. There is no woman who, when she receives a young man in her own house for the first time, and finds herself alone with him, does not indulge in some of the foregoing reflections; especially if he be clever or well-made, like Charles de Vandenesse. In the same way, few young men fail to base some secret aspirations upon one of the many thoughts that justify their instinctive love for beautiful, clever and unhappy women like Madame d'Aiglemont. And so the marchioness, when Monsieur de Vandenesse was announced, was somewhat disturbed; and he was almost ashamed,

notwithstanding the self-assurance which is, in some sort, a part of a diplomatist's costume. But the marchioness soon adopted the hearty manner behind which women take shelter against the possible interpretations of vanity. This manner precluded all mental reservation and made allowance, so to speak, for sentiment by tempering it with the forms of politeness. Women maintain themselves as long as they choose in this equivocal position, as at the meeting of four roads which lead to respect, indifference, astonishment and passion respectively. At thirty, a woman first understands the possibilities of that situation. She can laugh and joke and be pathetic therein without compromising herself. At that age, she possesses the necessary tact to play upon all the sensitive chords in a man's nature and to study the sounds she draws from them. Her silence is as dangerous as her speech. You can never guess at that age whether she is true or false, whether her confessions are made in sport or in good faith. After she has given you the right to contend with her, suddenly, by a word, by a glance, by one of those gestures whose power is well known to her, she puts an end to the battle, turns her back upon you, and remains mistress of your secret, at liberty to sacrifice you with a jest or to devote herself to you, protected alike by her own weakness and your strength. Although the marchioness took her stand upon neutral ground during this first visit, she maintained a lofty and dignified bearing. Her secret suffering was still hovering over her factitious

cheerfulness, like a light cloud that only partially conceals the sun. Vandenesse took his leave, having experienced a strange and unfamiliar pleasure in her conversation; but he was fully convinced that the marchioness was one of those women whose conquest costs so dear that a man cannot afford to fall in love with them.

"It would be an outpouring of sentiment forever and ever," he said to himself as he walked away, "a correspondence that would tire out an ambitious deputy clerk! And yet, if I chose—"

That fatal *If I chose!* has been the ruin of many an obstinate man. In France, self-esteem leads to passion. Charles called upon Madame d'Aiglemont again, and imagined that he could see that she enjoyed his conversation. Instead of abandoning himself frankly to the happiness of loving, he undertook thereupon to play a double rôle. He tried to appear impassioned, then to analyze in cold blood the progress of the intrigue, to be lover and diplomatist at once; but he was open-hearted and young, and his analysis was certain to lead him on to a love that knew no bounds; for the marchioness, artificial or natural, was always stronger than he. Every time that he left her house, Charles persisted in distrusting her, and subjected the successive stages through which his heart progressed to a strict analysis, which destroyed his own emotions.

"To-day," he said to himself after his third visit, "she gave me to understand that she is very unhappy, and alone in the world, and that, if it

were not for her daughter, she would ardently long for death. She seemed perfectly resigned. Now, I am neither her brother nor her confessor, and why did she confide her sorrows to me? She loves me."

Two days after, as he went away, he apostrophized modern morals:

"Love takes on the color of every age. In 1822 it is doctrinaire. Instead of manifesting itself, as formerly, by deeds, it is made the subject of discussion and dissertation and pulpit eloquence. Women are reduced to three methods: first, they throw doubt upon our passion, deny that we are capable of loving as they love. Coquetry! a veritable challenge which the marchioness threw in my face tonight. Secondly, they make themselves out as very unhappy to arouse our natural generous instincts or our self-esteem. Doesn't it flatter a young man to be allowed to offer solace in times of dire distress? Lastly, they have a mania for playing the virgin! She must have thought I believed her to be entirely new to the tender passion. My good faith may prove to be an excellent speculation."

But one day, after he had exhausted his suspicions, he began to wonder if the marchioness were not sincere; if such suffering could be feigned, why feign resignation? she lived quite alone, and devoured in silence the grief which could hardly be detected in the more or less constrained tone of an interjection. From that moment Charles took a keen interest in Madame d'Aiglemont. And yet, as he went to keep a regular appointment, which

had become a necessity to both of them, at an hour that each reserved for the other by a sort of mutual instinct, Vandenesse still deemed his mistress more adroit than genuine, and his last words were: "Unquestionably, she is a very shrewd woman." He entered and found the marchioness in her favorite attitude, an attitude of profound melancholy; she raised her eyes to his face without moving, and bestowed upon him one of those significant glances which resemble a smile. Her glance expressed confidence, true friendship, but not love. Charles sat down and could find nothing to say. He was moved by a sensation which there are no words to interpret.

"What is the matter?" she said, in a voice that betrayed emotion.

"Nothing—Yes," he added, "I was thinking of something that has not yet occurred to you."

"What is that?"

"Why—the Congress is at an end."

"Indeed," said she; "were you to have gone to the Congress?"

A direct answer would have been the most eloquent and most delicate of declarations, but Charles did not make it. Madame d'Aiglemont's face bore witness to a sincere friendship which destroyed all the scheming of vanity, all the hopes of love, all the suspicions of the diplomatist; she was or seemed to be entirely ignorant that she was beloved; and when Charles, painfully confused, reflected upon what had thus far taken place between them, he

was obliged to confess to himself that he had neither done nor said anything to authorize her to think it. He found the marchioness that evening just as she always was: simple and cordial, genuine in her grief, happy to have a friend, proud to have fallen in with a heart that understood her own; she went no farther than that, and did not suppose that a woman could allow herself to be seduced twice; but she had known what love is and kept it still bleeding in the depths of her heart; she did not imagine that happiness could intoxicate a woman twice, for she did not believe in the mind alone, but in the heart; and, in her view, love was not seduction, but it permitted all noble forms of seduction. At that moment, Charles became a young man once more; he was subjugated by the splendor of so grand a character and longed to be admitted to all the secrets of this existence, blasted by chance rather than by wrong-doing. Madame d'Aiglemont cast but one glance at her friend when he asked her the reason of the great burden of sorrow that imparted to her beauty all the harmonious characteristics of melancholy; but that searching glance was like the seal upon a solemn contract.

"Ask me no more such questions," said she. "Four years ago, on such a day as this, the man who loved me, the only man to whose happiness I would have sacrificed everything, even to my own esteem, died, and died to save my honor. That affair came to an end when it was still young and pure and full of illusions. Before I yielded to a passion

toward which I was impelled by an unexampled fatality, I had been fascinated, as so many young girls are to their undoing, by a man of attractive exterior, but with no mind. Marriage destroyed my hopes one by one. To-day I have lost legitimate happiness and the happiness which is named criminal, without having known happiness at all. I have nothing left. If I cannot die, I should at least remain faithful to my memories."

She did not weep as she spoke, but lowered her eyes and twisted her fingers in and out as her hands lay clasped, as usual, in her lap. It was said simply, but the tone of her voice was the expression of a despair as profound as her love seemed to be, and left Charles absolutely no hope. This ghastly existence, described in three phrases and emphasized by wringing her hands, this powerful grief in so frail a woman, this yawning abyss in a pretty head, in a word, the melancholy and tears of a sorrow four years old, fascinated Vandenesse, who sat silent and very small in his own estimation before that grand, noble woman: he no longer saw the exquisite, incomparable material beauty, but the keenly sensitive heart. He had met at last the ideal creature so often seen in improbable dreams and so loudly invoked by all those who throw their lives into a passion, pursue it with ardor, and often die before they have been able to enjoy the treasures of which they have dreamed.

In presence of that sublime beauty, and listening to the words she uttered, Charles's own ideas

seemed very narrow to him. Powerless as he was to raise his own language to the level of the scene, at once so simple and so lofty, he replied with some trite remark about the destiny of women.

"Madame," he said, "we must find a way to forget our sorrows, or dig graves for ourselves."

But reason always makes a paltry appearance beside sentiment; one is naturally limited, like everything that is positive, and the other is infinite. To reason when one should be guided by his feelings only, is the peculiar property of narrow minds. Vandenesse kept silence therefore, gazed long at Madame d'Aiglemont, and left the house. With his mind engrossed with new ideas which made the woman grander than ever in his eyes, he resembled a painter who, after he has taken the vulgar models of his studio for types, should suddenly fall in with the *Mnemosyne* of the Musée, the loveliest and the least appreciated of antique statues. Charles was profoundly smitten. He loved Madame d'Aiglemont with the good faith of youth, with the fervor that imparts to the first passion an ineffable charm, a candor that a man inevitably finds in ruins, when, later in life, he loves again: a delicious passion and almost always keenly enjoyed by the woman who arouses it, because at the lovely age of thirty, the poetic climax of a woman's life, she can embrace its whole course and look back into the past as well as forward into the future. Women then know all the value of love and enjoy it with the fear of losing it; then their hearts are still beautiful with the youth

that is soon to desert them, and their passion is constantly reinforced by the terrifying thought of the future.

"I am in love," said Vandenesse as he left the marchioness on this occasion, "and I am unlucky enough to have fallen in love with a woman who is bound hand and foot by memories of the past. It is a hard matter to contend with a dead man who isn't here, who can't say foolish things, who never does anything to displease her, and whose good qualities only are seen. Is it not trying to supplant perfection itself, to try and overcome the charms of memory and the hopes which survive a lost lover, just because he never aroused anything but desire, which is the loveliest and most seductive thing love has to offer?"

This melancholy reflection, due to discouragement and to the fear of failure with which all true passions begin, was the last effort at reasoning of his expiring diplomacy. Thenceforth he made no more mental reservations, but he became the plaything of his love, and lost himself among the trifles of the inexplicable happiness that feeds upon a word, a pause, a vague hope. He determined to love platonically, went every day to breathe the air that Madame d'Aiglemont breathed, almost became a part of her house, and accompanied her everywhere with the tyranny of a passion that combines selfishness with the most absolute devotion. Love has its instinct; it can find its way to the heart as the weakest insect goes straight to its flower with an

irresistible purpose that takes fright at nothing. So it is that, when a sentiment is genuine, its destiny is not doubtful. Is it not enough to cast a woman into all the anguish of dismay, if it occurs to her that her life depends upon the greater or less amount of force, persistence and honesty with which her lover seeks to accomplish his desires? Now, it is impossible for a woman, a wife, a mother to protect herself against a young man's love; the only thing in her power is to refuse to see him the moment that she divines the secret of the heart that a woman always does divine. But that course seems too decisive for a woman to take at an age when marriage weighs upon her, bores her and fatigues her, when conjugal affection is less than lukewarm, if indeed her husband has not already deserted her. Ugly women are flattered by a love that makes them beautiful; if they are young and charming, the power of fascination must be on a level with their fascinations, that is to say immense; if they are virtuous, a sublime but very earthly sentiment leads them to discover absolution in some form in the very grandeur of the sacrifices they make to their lovers, and of the glory to be won in the bitter struggle. Everything is a snare. Therefore, no lesson is too severe for such severe temptations. The enforced seclusion of women in Greece in former times, in the Orient, and recently to a considerable extent in England, is the only safeguard of morality; but where that system prevails, all the pleasures of life disappear; neither society, nor courtesy, nor refined

manners are possible. The nations will have to make their choice.

Some few months after her first meeting with Vandenesse, Madame d'Aiglemont found that her life was closely connected with that youth's, and she astonished herself, without overmuch confusion and almost with pleasure, by the discovery that she shared his thoughts and his inclinations. Had she adopted Vandenesse's ideas, or had Vandenesse made her slightest caprices his own? she made no investigation in that direction. Although she was already in the grasp of the current of passion, the adorable creature said to herself, with the false good-faith of fear:

"Oh no! I will be faithful to the man who died for me."

Pascal has said: "To doubt God is to believe in Him." In like manner, a woman does not struggle until she is caught. On the day when the marchioness confessed to herself that she was beloved, she found herself wavering among a thousand contrary sentiments. The superstitions of experience spoke their language. Would she be happy? could she find happiness outside the laws which society, rightly or wrongly, takes for its guide in matters of morality? Thus far, life had poured nothing into her cup but bitterness. Was it possible that there could be a happy ending to the union of two beings who are separated by the laws of society? But can one ever pay too high a price for happiness? And perhaps she would at last enjoy the happiness that

she had so fervently longed for, and that it is so natural to seek! Curiosity always pleads the cause of lovers. In the midst of this internal discussion Vandenesse arrived. His presence put to flight the metaphysical phantom of reason. If such are the successive transformations through which a sentiment passes, rapid though it be, in the mind of a young man and in the mind of a woman of thirty, there is a moment when the subtle distinctions blend, when the arguments all come together in a single one, in a single reflection which becomes confused with an aspiration and confirms it. The longer the resistance has been, the more powerful is the voice of love. Here ends, then, the lesson or rather the study of the *écorché*, if we may be allowed to borrow from the painter's art one of its most picturesque expressions; for this narrative describes the dangers and mechanism of love rather than paints them. But from that day forth each day added color to the skeleton, clothed it with the charms of youth, reanimated its flesh, gave new life to its movements, restored its brilliancy and beauty, the fascinations of sentiment and the attractions of life. Charles found Madame d'Aiglemont in a pensive mood; and when he said to her in an earnest tone which the seductive witchery of the heart made persuasive: "What is the matter?" she made no reply. That significant question denoted a perfect understanding between their hearts; and with the marvelous instinct of woman, the marchioness realized that a complaint or a word of her private

sorrow would be in some sort an advance. If every word they had already spoken had a meaning understood by them both, into what frightful pit was she about to step? She read her own mind with a clear, lucid glance, and held her peace, and her silence was imitated by Vandenesse.

"I am not well," said she at last, terrified at the possible results of a moment when the language of the eyes supplemented the helplessness of the tongue.

"Madame," replied Charles in a tender but deeply moved voice, "the body and the heart are closely connected. If you were happy, you would be young and fresh. Why do you refuse to ask of love all that love has taken from you? You believe that life is at an end just when it is really beginning for you. Trust yourself to the loving care of a friend. It is so sweet to be loved!"

"I am old already," said she, "so that I have no excuse for not continuing to suffer as in the past. But, you say, I must love? Ah! I cannot, nor ought I to. Besides yourself, whose friendship casts some pleasure on my life, I care for nobody, and there is nobody who can efface my memories of the past. I accept a friend, I would fly from a lover. And would it be generous in me to give a blighted heart in exchange for a fresh, young heart, to welcome illusions which I can no longer share, to cause a happiness in which I should not believe, or which I should fear to lose? I should repay its devotion with selfishness perhaps, and scheme for my own

profit when it was moved by deep feeling; my memory would blunt the keenness of its enjoyment. No, a first love is never replaced, you see. Indeed, what man would care for my heart at such a price?"

These words, inspired by a ghastly sort of coquetry, were the last struggle of her virtue.

"If he loses heart, well, I will remain alone and faithful." That thought came to her mind, and was to her what the too slender willow branch is to the swimmer who seizes it before he is carried away by the current.

When he heard that decree, Vandenesse allowed an involuntary movement to escape him, which had more effect upon the marchioness's heart than all his past assiduity. The thing that touches a woman most is not the charming refinement of courtesy she may meet with at our hands, or the sentiments as exquisite as her own; for, in them, grace and refinement are symbols of the *true*. Charles's impulsive gesture revealed genuine love. Madame d'Aiglemont could measure the strength of his affection by the strength of her own grief.

"You are right, perhaps," said the young man coldly. "A new love, a new disappointment."

Then he changed the subject and talked about indifferent things; but he was visibly moved and gazed at Madame d'Aiglemont with concentrated attention, as if it were for the last time. At last he left her, saying, with emotion:

"Adieu, madame."

"Au revoir," said she, with the sly coquetry, the

secret of which belongs only to the chosen few among women.

He made no reply, but went away.

When Charles was no longer present, when his empty chair spoke for him, she had numberless regrets and blamed herself freely. Passion is making enormous progress in a woman's heart when she begins to think that she has acted ungenerously or has wounded some noble soul. One should never look with distrust upon harsh sentiments in love; they are very salutary; women succumb only under the weight of a virtue. *Hell is paved with good intentions* is not a mere preacher's paradox. For some days Vandenesse did not return. Every evening at the hour at which he usually called, the marchioness awaited him with remorseful impatience. To write him would be a confession; besides, her instinct told her that he would return. On the sixth day, her footman announced him. Never had she heard his name with more real pleasure. Her joy frightened her.

"You have punished me severely," she said.

Vandenesse looked at her with a bewildered air.

"Punished you!" he repeated. "For what, pray?"

He understood her meaning perfectly; but he wished to take his revenge for the suffering he had undergone as soon as she suspected it.

"Why did you not come to see me?" she asked with a smile.

"Have you seen no one meanwhile?" he said, to avoid a direct reply.

"Monsieur de Ronquerolles and Monsieur de Marsay were here nearly two hours yesterday, and little D'Esgrignon about the same time this morning. I have also seen Madame Firmiani, I believe, and your sister, Madame de Listomère."

Another pang! incomprehensible to those who do not love with the all-pervading, ferocious despotism, whose least important effect is a horrible jealousy, a perpetual desire to remove the loved one from every influence unconnected with one's love.

"What!" said Vandenesse to himself, "she has received visitors, she has conversed with other contented beings, while I, poor, miserable wretch, remained by myself!"

He buried his chagrin and tossed his love to the bottom of his heart, as a coffin is tossed into the sea. His thoughts were of the sort one does not put into words, swift as the acids that kill as they evaporate. But his brow was overcast, and Madame d'Aiglemont obeyed her woman's instinct by sharing his dejection without understanding it. She was not privy to the evil she was doing, and Vandenesse discovered that fact. He spoke of his situation and his jealousy as if they were some of the hypotheses that lovers take pleasure in discussing. The marchioness understood it all, and was thereupon so deeply moved that she could not restrain her tears. At that moment they entered the paradise of love. Heaven and hell are two great poems which set forth in form the only two points upon which our existence turns: joy and sorrow. Is not heaven, will it not always

be, an image of the infinitude of our sentiments, which will never be painted except in its details, because happiness is always the same; and does not hell represent the infinite tortures of our sorrows, whereof we can construct a poetic fabric because they are all dissimilar?

One evening the lovers were alone, seated side by side, in silence, and gazing intently at one of the loveliest aspects of the firmament, a sky of purest blue tinged slightly with purple and gold by the last rays of the setting sun. At that time of day, the gradual fading of the light seems to awaken tender sentiments; our passions vibrate gently and we have a troubled consciousness of some vague disturbance amid the tranquillity. By showing happiness to us by means of vague images, nature invites us to enjoy it when it is near at hand, or causes us to regret it when it has fled. At such moments, fertile in enchantment, beneath the canopy of the lovely light whose harmonious beauty lends its aid to the voice of the seducer, it is hard to resist the impulses of the heart, which are then possessed of such magic power! then chagrin is blunted, joy intoxicates and sorrow overwhelms. The pompous approach of evening gives the signal for confessions and encourages them. Silence becomes more dangerous than speech, for it imparts to the eyes all the power of the infinite expanse of heaven which is reflected in their depth. If you speak, the lightest word possesses an irresistible power. For is there not at such times light in the

voice and purple in the glance? Is it not as if heaven were in us, or does it not seem as if we were in heaven? However, Vandenesse and Julie —for some days she had allowed herself to be addressed thus familiarly by him whom she took pleasure in calling Charles—Vandenesse and Julie were talking, but the original subject of their conversation had long since disappeared; and, although they no longer knew the meaning of their words, they listened with delight to the secret thoughts they served to cloak. The marchioness's hand lay in Vandenesse's, and she abandoned it to him without a thought that it was a favor.

They placed their heads together to gaze upon a majestic landscape of snow-covered fields, of glaciers, and the gray shadows that darkened the slopes of mountains of fantastic shape; a picture filled with sharp contrasts between the red tongues of flame and the dark shades that embellish the heavens with inimitable but fleeting poesy; magnificent swaddling clothes in which the sun is born again, a lovely winding sheet in which it expires. At that moment, Julie's hair brushed against Vandenesse's cheek; she felt the slight contact, she shivered violently, and he even more than she; for both had gradually reached one of those inexplicable crises in which the tranquillity of nature imparts such delicate perception to the senses that the slightest shock causes the tears to fall and the sadness in the heart to overflow, if the heart is given over to sad thoughts, or gives it ineffable joy if it

is lost in the vertigo of love. Julie almost involuntarily pressed her friend's hand. This persuasive pressure inspired the timid lover with courage. The bliss of that moment and the hope of the future blended in the emotion of a first caress, the chaste and modest kiss that Madame d'Aiglemont allowed him to bestow upon her cheek. The more trivial the favor, the more potent, the more dangerous it was. Unhappily for both there was no falsity or pretence in it. It was the token of a complete understanding between two noble hearts, separated by the law, united by all nature's power of seduction.

At that moment General d'Aiglemont entered the room.

"There has been a change of ministry," he said. "Your uncle is a member of the new cabinet. So you have a most excellent chance to be an ambassador, Vandenesse."

Charles and Julie glanced at each other and blushed. This mutual shame was an additional bond between them. Both had the same thought, the same feeling of remorse; a terrible bond, and every whit as strong between two brigands who have just murdered a man as between two lovers guilty of a kiss. It was necessary to answer the marquis.

"I have no desire to leave Paris again," said Charles de Vandenesse.

"We know why," rejoined the general, with the knowing air of a man who has fathomed a secret.

"You don't want to leave your uncle, so that he may make you the heir of his peerage."

The marchioness fled to her room, with this harsh criticism of her husband upon her lips:

"He is too great a fool for words!"

The Finger of God

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Between the Barrière d'Italie and the Barrière de la Santé, on the inner boulevard leading to the Jardin des Plantes, there is a view well calculated to enchant the artist, or the traveler who is most *blasé* upon the subject of lovely landscapes. When you reach the summit of a gentle eminence, from which the boulevard, shaded by tall trees with dense foliage, curves away as gracefully as a green-carpeted, silent woodland avenue, you see before you, at your feet, a deep valley, dotted with unpretentious structures, with patches of verdure here and there, and watered by the dark-colored streams of the Bièvre or the Gobelins. On the opposite slope some thousands of roofs, huddled together like heads in a crowd, conceal the destitution of Faubourg Saint-Marceau. The magnificent cupola of the Panthéon, and the sad-colored, melancholy dome of the Val-de-Grâce tower proudly over a whole city laid out like an amphitheatre, the successive tiers being designed in strange fashion by winding streets. From that point the proportions of the two monuments seem gigantic; they dwarf the frail dwellings and the tallest poplars in the valley. At the left, the Observatoire, through whose windows and

galleries the light produces indescribably fantastic effects, looks like a gaunt, black spectre. In the distance, the graceful dome of the Invalides glistens between the bluish masses of the Luxembourg and the gray towers of Saint-Sulpice. As seen from that point the architectural lines are mingled with the foliage, the shadows, and subjected to the caprices of a sky that offers an incessant change in color, light and general appearance. Far away from you the air is peopled with great buildings; around you is a labyrinth of waving trees, of country paths. At the right through a broad cleft in this peculiar landscape, you perceive the long white sheet of the Canal Saint-Martin, framed with reddish stones, adorned with lindens, and bordered by those truly Roman structures, the public granaries. There, stretching away in the background, the smoky hills of Belleville, covered with houses and mills, blend their inequalities with those of the clouds. But there is a city that you do not see, between the row of roofs that border the valley and yonder horizon, vague as a memory of childhood; an immense city, lost, as at the bottom of a precipice, between the towers of the Hôpital de la Pitié and the summit of the cemetery of the East, between suffering and death. It emits a dull rumbling sound like that made by the Ocean beating against the foot of a cliff, as if to say: "I am here." If the sun pours its floods of light upon this side of Paris, if it purifies it, if it softens its lines, if it sets some windows here ablaze, brightens up the roofs, sets

fire to the gilded crosses, whitens the walls and transforms the atmosphere into a veil of gauze; if it creates rich contrasts with the fantastic shadows; if the sky is blue and the earth quivers, if the bells speak, then you may gaze in admiration upon one of those eloquent scenes from fairyland, which the imagination never forgets, and with which you will be as enchanted, as enraptured as with a marvelous view of Naples or Stamboul, or a landscape in Florida. Nothing is lacking to the perfect harmony of the concert. There the sounds of the busy world and the poetic peace of solitude, the voices of a million beings and the voice of God are murmuring together. There a capital city lies beneath the nodding cypresses of Père-Lachaise.

On a certain morning in spring, just as the sun was bringing out in full relief all the beauties of the landscape, I was gazing in admiration upon them as I stood leaning against a great elm, whose yellow flowers were swaying in the wind. At the sight of that rich, sublime picture, I reflected bitterly upon the contempt we profess, even in our books, for our country as it is to-day. I cursed the poor-spirited rich men who, being disgusted with our fair land of France, have purchased the right to look down upon their native country, by visiting at a gallop and examining through an opera glass the famous localities in Italy, which has become so commonplace. I was gazing fondly at modern Paris and musing deeply, when suddenly the sound of a kiss disturbed my solitude and put philosophy to flight. On the

lateral path that crowns the steep incline at whose foot the waters murmur, I espied a woman looking out beyond the Pont des Gobelins; she seemed to be still quite young, was dressed with the greatest simplicity and refinement, and her sweet face seemed to reflect the cheerful humor of the landscape. A handsome young man was just putting down the prettiest little boy it is possible to imagine, so that I never knew whether the kiss was bestowed on the mother's cheek or on the child's. The same thought, loving and ardent, shone in the eyes, in the smile, in the gestures of both the young people. They wound their arms about each other with such joyous freedom and drew close together with such marvelous concert of movement, that, being entirely wrapped up in themselves, they did not notice my presence. But another child, a discontented, sulky child, who kept her back turned to them, glanced at me with a most striking expression in her eyes. Leaving her brother to run about alone, sometimes in advance of her mother and the young man and sometimes behind them, this child, who was as beautiful and graceful as the other, but more slender, remained dumb and motionless, in the attitude of a torpid serpent. It was a little girl. There was something curiously mechanical about the promenade of the pretty woman and her companion. Contenting themselves, perhaps through absent-mindedness, with traversing the short space between the little bridge and a carriage that was standing at a turn in the boulevard, they went over

the same ground again and again, stopping, looking at each other, laughing at the capricious bidding of a conversation that was by turns animated, languishing, joyous or solemn.

Hidden by the great elm, I enjoyed this charming scene to the full, and should doubtless have respected its mysteries, had I not detected upon the thoughtful, taciturn little girl's face the traces of more profound thought than was consistent with her age. When her mother and the young man turned back after approaching her, she would frequently put her head slyly forward and dart a furtive glance of most extraordinary meaning at them and at her brother. But no words could describe the piercing shrewdness, the mischievous innocence, the fierce attention that lighted up that childish face with its scarcely perceptible circle about the eyes, when the pretty woman or her companion smoothed the little boy's fair locks or threw their arms about his soft neck with its little white collar, when the fancy took him to try and walk with them. There was something very like a man's passion on the strange child's thin features. She was suffering or she was in deep thought. Now, which is the more certain forerunner of death in such budding creatures as she? is it physical suffering, or is it the premature thought that consumes their unformed minds? A mother knows, perhaps. For my own part I can imagine nothing more horrible than an old man's thought upon a child's brow; blasphemy on a virgin's lips is less monstrous than that. So it was

that the almost stupid manner of this thoughtful child, and the infrequency of her movements, aroused my interest. I examined her curiously. It naturally occurred to me, as a disinterested observer, to compare her with her brother, seeking to detect the points of resemblance and of difference between them. The girl had brown hair, black eyes and an appearance of precocious strength that formed a striking contrast to the fair hair, sea-green eyes and charming weakness of the younger child. The elder was apparently some seven or eight years of age, the other not more than four. They were dressed alike; but as I looked carefully at them I noticed a difference in their shirt collars; trivial enough it was, but a little later it revealed to me a whole romance in the past, a whole drama in the future. And yet it was a very small matter. The little brunette's collar had a plain hem along the edge, while her brother's was embellished with pretty embroidery, betraying a secret of the heart, an unspoken favoritism which children can read in their mother's hearts as surely as if they possessed God's power. The fair-haired boy, joyous and heedless, resembled a little girl, his skin was so white and smooth, his movements so graceful, his expression so sweet; while the elder, despite her strength, despite the beauty of her features and her brilliant complexion, resembled a sickly little boy. Her sharp eyes, which had none of the humid vapor that imparts such charm to a child's expression, seemed to have been dried up by an internal fire,

like courtiers' eyes. Her white skin had an indefinable lustreless olive tinge, an indication of a forceful character. Twice her young brother ran up and offered her with touching grace, with a sweet glance and an expressive gesture that would have enchanted Charlet, the tiny hunting-horn upon which he blew lustily from time to time; but on both occasions she made no other reply than a fierce glance to his: "Here, Hélène, don't you want to take it?" said in a most affectionate tone. A sombre, terrible creature, beneath her apparent heedlessness of manner, the little girl started and even flushed hotly when her brother came near her; but he did not seem to notice his sister's black humor, and his joyous interest in his surroundings put the finishing touch to the contrast between genuine childish innocence and the knowledge that makes men thoughtful, and that was already written upon the girl's features and had dimmed their beauty with its dark clouds.

"Mamma, Hélène won't play with me," the little fellow cried, selecting for his complaint a moment when his mother and the young man were standing silently on the Pont des Gobelins.

"Let her alone, Charles. You know very well that she is always cross."

These words, uttered thoughtlessly by the mother, who at once turned abruptly away with the young man, brought tears to Hélène's eyes. She devoured them in silence, darted at her brother one of those searching glances that were inexplicable to me, and looked with ominous meaning at the slope, at the

top of which he stood, then at the Bièvre river, the bridge, the surrounding country and myself.

I feared that I might be noticed by the young couple, whose interview I should doubtless have disturbed; so I softly withdrew and took refuge behind a hedge of elder bushes, whose foliage concealed me completely from all eyes. I sat quietly down at the top of the slope, looking by turns at the ever-changing beauties of the landscape, and at the wild little girl, whom it was still possible for me to catch a glimpse of through the interstices of the hedge and between the slender trunks of the elder bushes against which my head was resting, almost on a level with the boulevard. Hélène seemed disturbed when she no longer saw me; her black eyes sought me along the avenue and behind the trees with inexplicable interest. What was I to her? At that moment Charles's innocent laughter rang out in the silence like the song of a bird. The handsome young man, as fair as the child himself, was dancing him in his arms, and kissed him again and again, lavishing upon him the meaningless words, or, if you please, words used in some other than their real meaning, which we all say playfully to children. The mother smiled at them as they played together, and from time to time said, in an undertone doubtless, a word or two that came from her heart; for her companion would pause, beaming with happiness, and look down at her with eyes full of fire and idolatry. Their voices, mingled with the child's, had an indescribably pleasing effect upon

me. They were all charming. This delightful scene, in the centre of that superb landscape, spread an incredibly soothing influence around. A lovely, fair-haired, laughing woman, a love-child, a man in the bloom of youth, a cloudless sky, in a word, all the beauteous creatures of Nature united their harmonies to rejoice the soul. I surprised myself in a smile, as if their happiness were mine. The handsome young man heard the clock strike nine. Having exchanged a loving embrace with his companion, who had become grave, almost sad, he returned to his tilbury, which came slowly forward driven by an old servant. The prattle of the beloved child mingled with the sound of the last kisses the young man gave him. When he had entered his carriage and the woman was standing, listening to the departing wheels, and following the line of dust along the green roadway of the boulevard, Charles ran to his sister, who was then near the bridge, and I heard him say to her in his silvery voice:

"Why didn't you come and say adieu to my dear friend?"

When she saw her brother standing on the sloping bank, Hélène flashed upon him the most terrible glance that ever shone in a child's eyes and pushed him in obedience to an impulse of blind rage. Charles slipped upon the steep incline and tripped over a root that threw him heavily upon the sharp stones of the wall; he bruised his head upon them and then, covered with blood, rolled down into the muddy waters of the river. The water splashed up

in innumerable dark jets about his pretty, fair face. I heard the poor child's piercing shrieks; but soon his voice was stifled in the mud, where he disappeared with a dull sound like that made by a stone when it sinks. The lightning flash is not more swift than that fall was. I sprang to my feet in hot haste and ran down to the river by a path. Hélène stupefied with terror, was shrieking at the top of her voice:

"Mamma! mamma!"

The mother was there beside me. She had flown to the spot like a bird. But neither the mother's eyes nor mine could determine the precise spot where the child had gone down. The black water covered an immense space. The bed of the Bièvre at that point is covered with mud to the depth of ten feet. The child must surely die there, it was impossible to save him. At that hour—it was a Sunday—everybody was resting. There were no boats or fishermen on the river. I could find no rod to sound the filthy stream, nor could I see a living being in the distance. Why, in Heaven's name, should I have spoken of this ghastly incident, or told the secret of this catastrophe? Perhaps Hélène had avenged her father. Her jealousy was the sword of God, undoubtedly. And yet I shuddered as I looked at the mother. To what a terrible questioning her husband, her eternal judge, would compel her to submit! And she carried with her an incorruptible witness. The child's brow is transparent, its coloring diaphanous; and falsehood in a

child is like a light that casts a flush upon his very glance. The unhappy woman had not thought as yet of the torture that awaited her at home. She was looking at the Bièvre.

Such an event was certain to produce a terrible effect upon a woman's life, and the following was one of the most terrible of the echoes that disturbed Julie's love from time to time:

Two or three years later, one evening after dinner, a notary was present at the house of the Marquis de Vandenesse, who was then in mourning for his father and had some matters touching the succession, to adjust. The notary in question was not the little notary of whom Sterne wrote, but a stout, vulgar notary of Paris, one of those estimable persons who do idiotic things with the utmost solemnity, plant their foot heavily upon a hidden wound and ask why you complain. If, by chance, they learn the wherefore of their murderous stupidity, they say: "On my word, I knew nothing about it!" In short, he was an honest donkey of a notary, who had no idea of anything in life but *deeds*. The diplomat had Madame d'Aiglemont with him. The general had obligingly taken his leave before the dinner was at an end, to take his children to some theatre on the boulevards—the *Ambigu-Comique* or the *Gaieté*. Although melodramas excite the emotions to an unhealthy degree, they are considered at Paris to be within the proper sphere of childhood, and innocuous, because they always end in the triumph of innocence. The father had gone

before the dessert, his son and daughter insisting so strenuously on arriving at the theatre before the curtain rose.

The notary, the imperturbable notary, quite incapable of asking himself why Madame d'Aiglemont sent her husband and children to the play and did not go with them, had been, since dinner, screwed to his chair to all intents. A discussion that arose had kept them a long while over their dessert, and the servants were slow in serving coffee. These incidents, which consumed time that was doubtless valuable to her, called forth divers impatient gestures from the pretty woman: she might have been compared to a race-horse pawing the ground before the race. The notary, who had no knowledge of horses or of women, considered the marchioness a very sprightly and vivacious person. Enchanted to be in the company of a fashionable lady and a renowned politician, the good notary played the wit; he took as a mark of approbation the forced smile on the marchioness's face, whom he annoyed beyond measure, and he continued as he had begun. The master of the house, in concert with his companion, had already taken the liberty of keeping silent on several occasions when the notary expected a hearty response; but during those significant periods of repose, the devil of a fellow sat and looked at the fire, trying to remember anecdotes. Then the diplomat had recourse to his watch. At last the pretty woman put on her hat to go, but did not go. The notary saw nothing, heard nothing;

he was enchanted with himself, and felt sure of interesting the marchioness sufficiently to nail her to her seat.

"I shall certainly have this lady for a client," he said to himself.

The marchioness stood up, put on her gloves, wrung her hands, and looked from Monsieur de Vandenesse, who shared her impatience, to the notary, who weighted every one of his shafts of wit with lead. At every pause the worthy man made, the comely couple breathed again, saying to each other by a sign: "At last he is going!" But no. It was a moral nightmare which was likely to end by irritating the two passionate beings, upon whom the notary acted as a serpent acts upon birds, and by driving them to adopt summary measures. In the midst of the story of the base means by which Du Tillet, a man of business then high in favor, had made his fortune—all the infamous details being set forth with scrupulous exactness by the notary,—the diplomat heard the clock strike nine; he saw that his notary was a hopeless imbecile who must be dismissed without ceremony, and he sealed his determination with a gesture.

"Are you looking for your eye-glasses, Monsieur le Marquis?" said the notary, offering his to his client.

"No, monsieur, I am compelled to send you away. Madame proposes to join her children and I am to have the honor of accompanying her."

"Nine o'clock already! time passes like a shadow

in the society of agreeable people," said the notary, who had been talking all alone for an hour.

He looked for his hat, then planted himself in front of the fireplace, with difficulty restraining a hiccough, and said to his client, unconscious of the withering glances the marchioness was darting at him:

"To resume, Monsieur le Marquis. Business before everything. To-morrow, then, we will serve a summons on monsieur your brother, to make demand in conformity with the law; we will proceed to the inventory and then, on my word—" The notary had so entirely misunderstood his client's intentions that he was going about the business in a manner directly opposed to the instructions that had been given him. It was such a delicate matter that Vandenesse instinctively attempted to rectify his stupid notary's ideas, and a discussion ensued which took a considerable time.

"Look you," said the marquis at last, at a sign the marchioness made him, "you are driving me mad; come again to-morrow at nine o'clock with my solicitor."

"But I have the honor, Monsieur le Marquis, to call your attention to the fact that we are not certain of finding Monsieur Desroches to-morrow, and if the summons isn't served before noon, the time will expire, and—"

At that moment a carriage drove into the courtyard, and, when she heard the wheels, the poor woman turned her head away to hide the tears that

came to her eyes. The marquis rang to bid the servant say that he had gone out; but the general, returning unexpectedly from the *Gaieté*, preceded the footman, and appeared in the doorway, leading with one hand his daughter, her eyes red with weeping, and with the other his little son, as cross and sulky as you please.

"What has happened to you, pray?" the marchioness asked her husband.

"I will tell you later," the general replied, walking toward an adjoining boudoir, where he could see the evening papers through the open door.

The marchioness, annoyed beyond measure, threw herself in despair on a couch.

The notary, feeling called upon to make himself agreeable to the children, said to the boy in an affected tone:

"Well, my little man, what was the play?"

"*La Vallée du Torrent*," grumbled Gustave.

"On the faith of a man of honor," said the notary, "the authors of our day are half mad! *La Vallée du Torrent!* Why not *Le Torrent de la Vallée?* It is possible that a valley may not have a torrent, and, if they said *Le Torrent de la Vallée*, the authors would signify something clear, precise, characteristic, comprehensible. But never mind that. Will you tell me how there can be a drama in a torrent and in a valley? You will answer that the principal attraction of plays of that sort consists in these days in the scenery, and that that title gives promise of something very beautiful in that way.

You enjoyed yourself immensely, eh, my little man?" he added, sitting down in front of the child.

When the notary asked how there could be a drama in a torrent, the marchioness's daughter turned slowly around and wept. The mother was so intensely annoyed that she did not notice her daughter's movements.

"Oh! yes, monsieur, I did enjoy myself," the child replied. "There was a nice little boy in the play who was all alone in the world because his papa couldn't be his papa. When he came to a great high bridge over the river, a tall villain with a long beard, dressed all in black, threw him into the water. Hélène began to cry and sob, and everybody in the hall hooted at us, so my father very quickly, very quickly brought us away—"

Monsieur de Vandenesse and the marchioness sat in a sort of stupor, as if some disease had deprived them of the power to think or act.

"Hold your tongue, Gustave!" cried the general. "I forbade you to speak about what happened at the theatre, and you have forgotten so soon what I told you."

"I trust your Lordship will forgive me, Monsieur le Marquis," said the notary, "I did wrong to question him, but I was unaware of the gravity of—"

"He should not have answered," said the father, with a cold glance at his son.

The cause of the sudden return of the children and their father seemed perfectly comprehensible to the diplomat and the marchioness. The mother

glanced at her daughter, saw that she was weeping and rose to go to her; but her features contracted violently, and assumed an expression of harshness which nothing could temper.

"Enough of this, Hélène," said she; "go and dry your tears in the boudoir."

"Why, what has the poor little dear done?" said the notary, attempting to allay the mother's anger and the daughter's grief at the same time. "She is so pretty that she ought to be the best little girl in the world; I am very sure, madame, that she never gives you anything but pleasure. Isn't that so, my dear?"

Hélène glanced tremblingly at her mother, wiped away her tears, tried to compose her features, and fled into the boudoir.

"Most assuredly, madame," the notary went on, "you are too good a mother not to love all your children equally. You are too virtuous, also, to exhibit those lamentable preferences, whose sad effects are disclosed more particularly to us notaries. Society passes through our hands; and we see its passions only in their most hideous guise—self-interest. For instance, a mother seeks to disinherit her husband's children for the benefit of other children whom she prefers to them; while, for his part, the husband sometimes wishes to reserve his fortune for the child that has merited its mother's hatred. And then there are contests and apprehensions and deeds and revocations and pretended sales and trusts; in short, a pitiful mess—pitiful, on my word

of honor! Again, fathers pass their lives disinheriting their children and stealing their wives' property.—Yes, stealing is the word. We were talking of the drama; ah! I assure you that, if we could tell the secret of certain bequests, our authors could base some ghastly bourgeois tragedies thereupon. I don't know what power women use to enable them to do what they choose; for, notwithstanding appearances and their weakness, they always carry the day. Ah! but they don't catch me, you know. I always divine the motive of this favoritism which in society is politely termed indefinable! But husbands never divine it, we must do them that justice. You will agree with me in this that there are charms of—"

Hélène, who had returned from the boudoir to the salon with her father, was listening attentively to the notary, and understood him so perfectly that she glanced fearfully at her mother, feeling, with the unerring instinct of youth, that this incident would redouble the severity that hovered over her. The marchioness turned pale, as she called Vandenesse's attention, with a terrified gesture, to her husband, who was gazing pensively at the flowers in the carpet. At that moment, notwithstanding his good breeding, the diplomat could contain himself no longer, and darted a withering glance at the notary.

"Come this way, monsieur," said he, walking hastily toward the room adjoining the salon.

The notary followed, trembling, and left his sentence unfinished.

"Monsieur," said the Marquis de Vandenesse with concentrated fury, after he had violently closed the door of the salon where he had left the husband and wife, "since dinner you have done nothing but make a fool of yourself and make idiotic speeches. For God's sake, begone! you will end by causing some horrible disaster. You may be an excellent notary, but remain in your office; and if, by any chance, you do find yourself in society, try to behave more circumspectly."

With that, he returned to the salon, leaving the notary without so much as bowing to him. That worthy stood for a moment utterly taken aback, paralyzed, unable to say where he was. When the ringing in his ears ceased, he fancied that he heard groaning and running to and fro in the salon, where the bells were rung violently. He was afraid of meeting the Marquis de Vandenesse again and succeeded in recovering the use of his legs sufficiently to decamp and make the best of his way to the stairway; but, at the door of the apartments, he encountered the servants hastening to obey their master's summons.

"That's the way with all these great lords," said he to himself, when he was finally in the street, looking for a cab; "they ask you to speak and egg you on with compliments, and you imagine you are entertaining them; but not at all! They say impertinent things to you, keep you at a distance, and even throw you out of doors without ceremony. In point of fact, I was very clever indeed; I said

nothing that wasn't sensible, pertinent and proper. My word, he advises me to have more circumspection; I don't lack circumspection. Deuce take me! I'm a notary and a member of my Chamber. Bah! it's a mere ambassador's whim; nothing is sacred to those fellows. To-morrow he shall explain to me what he means by saying that I did nothing but make a fool of myself and make idiotic speeches in his house. I will demand satisfaction, that is to say, I will ask him what he means! After all, perhaps I was ill-advised.—'Faith, it's very kind of me to bother my head about them! What is it to me?"

The notary went home and submitted the problem to his better half, relating the events of the evening to the most trifling detail.

"My dear Crottat, his Excellency was quite right in saying that you had done nothing but make a fool of yourself and say idiotic things."

"Why so?"

"My dear, if I should tell you, it wouldn't prevent your beginning the same thing to-morrow somewhere else. But I advise you never to talk about anything but business in society."

"If you don't tell me, to-morrow I will ask—"

"*Mon Dieu!* the greatest fools study how to hide such things, and you fancy an ambassador will tell you about them! Why, Crottat, I never saw you so utterly bereft of sense."

"Thank you, my dear!"

The Two Meetings

*

A former officer of ordnance under Napoléon, whom we will call simply the marquis or the general, and whose fortunes rose very high under the Restoration, had come to pass the summer at Versailles, where he occupied a country house situated between the church and the Barrière de Montreuil, on the road leading to Avenue de Saint-Cloud. His duties at court did not permit him to go far away from Paris.

This country house, originally erected to serve as a place of shelter for the ephemeral love-affairs of some great nobleman, had very extensive appurtenances. The gardens, in the centre of which it was situated, separated it by an equal interval on each side from the first houses of Montreuil and the hovels built about the barrier; and so, without being too much isolated, the proprietors of this estate enjoyed all the pleasures of solitude within two steps of a city. By a strange contradiction, the façade of the house and the main entrance were directly upon the road, which was formerly little frequented, it may be. This hypothesis seems the more probable if we remember that it ends at the lovely pavilion erected by Louis XV. for

Mademoiselle de Romans, and that, before reaching that point, the interested observer will recognize, here and there, more than one *casino*, whose interior appearance and decoration are eloquent of the wit-seasoned orgies of our ancestors, who, although all sorts of debauchery are laid to their charge, nevertheless sought mystery and darkness.

On a certain winter evening, the marquis and his wife and children were alone in the deserted house. Their servants had obtained leave to go to Versailles to attend the wedding of one of their number; and, presuming that the solemnity of the Christmas season, in conjunction with the wedding, would afford them a sufficient excuse with their masters, they did not scruple to devote a little more time to the festivities than was provided in the orders issued. However, as the general was known to be a man who had never failed to carry out his agreements with inflexible probity, the refractory domestics were conscious of some remorse as they danced on after the allotted time had expired. The clock struck eleven and not a servant had arrived. The profound silence that prevailed in the neighborhood enabled them to hear, at intervals, the north wind whistling through the leafless branches, groaning around the house, or losing itself in the long corridors. The frost had purified the air, hardened the ground and solidified the pavements so thoroughly, that everything gave forth the dry sonorous sound, whose phenomena constantly surprise us. The heavy step of a belated reveler, or the rumbling of

a cab returning to Paris, made a much louder noise and could be heard at a much greater distance than usual. The dead leaves, set dancing by a sudden gust of wind, rustled over the stones of the court-yard, and gave a voice to the darkness when it chose to remain dumb. It was, in short, one of those sharp evenings which extort from our selfishness a sterile word of pity for the poor man or the wayfarer, and make the chimney corner such a blissful abiding place. At that moment, the family assembled in the salon were giving little thought to the absence of the servants, or to the homeless, or to the poesy with which a winter evening sparkles. Without philosophizing upon irrelevant subjects, the women and children, trusting in the protection of an old soldier, were enjoying to the full the pleasures engendered by domestic life, when the feelings are not under restraint, when words and looks and amusements alike are animated by affection and frankness.

The general was seated, or, more correctly speaking, buried in a spacious, high-backed reclining-chair, at the corner of the hearth, whereon a brisk fire was burning, giving forth the tingling warmth that indicates excessive cold without. Resting against the back of the chair and bent slightly forward, this excellent father's head lay in a languid attitude that told of perfect tranquillity, of a delicious diffusion of comfort through his whole being. His arms, half-asleep, were thrown carelessly over the arms of his chair, and put the finishing touch to

the suggestion of happiness. He was watching the smallest of his children, a boy of about five years, who was running about, half-naked, refusing to allow his mother to undress him. The urchin fled from the shirt and nightcap with which the marchioness sometimes threatened him; he kept on his embroidered collar and laughed at his mother when she called him, for he saw that she herself laughed at his childish rebellion; then he began to play with his sister, who was as playful as he, but more mischievous, and who spoke more distinctly than he,—his vague words and confused ideas being hardly intelligible to his parents. Little Moïna, his senior by two years, called forth constant laughter by her prematurely womanish, coquettish ways,—loud peals of laughter for which there seemed to be no cause; but to see them both rolling about in front of the fire, displaying without shame their pretty plump bodies, their graceful, white figures, mingling their black and flaxen curls, rubbing their pink cheeks together, on which joy stamped the dimples of innocence, surely a father, a mother above all, would understand those tiny minds, already, in their eyes, endowed with characters and passions. The two little angels, with the brilliant coloring of their humid eyes, their blooming cheeks and their fair skin, outshone the flowers in the carpet, the scene of their disputes, upon which they fell and rolled and fought and overthrew each other without danger. Sitting upon a couch at the other side of the hearth, opposite her husband, was the mother,

surrounded by scattered articles of clothing, with a red shoe in her hand, in an attitude of graceful negligence. Her irresolute severity expired in a grave smile that played about her lips. She was about thirty-six years of age, and still retained a beauty that was due to the rare perfection of the lines of her face, to which the heat, the light and happiness imparted a supernatural brilliancy at that moment. Frequently she ceased to look at her children to turn her eyes caressingly upon her husband's grave face; and sometimes, as they met, the eyes of the husband and wife exchanged a glance of silent enjoyment and profound reflection. The general's face was much sunburned. A lock or two of grizzled hair fell down upon his broad, unwrinkled brow. The manly gleam of his blue eyes, the courage written in the wrinkles of his scarred cheeks proved that he had purchased by hard work, the red ribbon that adorned the buttonhole of his coat. At that moment the innocent delight expressed by his two children was reflected upon his strong and resolute countenance, which was marked by indescribable kindness of heart and candor. The old captain had become young again without excessive effort. Is there not always more or less love for children in the hearts of soldiers, who have had enough experience of the woes of life to realize the paltriness of strength and the privilege of weakness?

A short distance away, at a round table lighted by astral lamps, whose bright light overpowered the pale glimmer of the candles on the mantelpiece, was

a boy of thirteen, rapidly turning the pages of a bulky volume. The shouts of his brother and sister did not distract his attention, and his face betrayed the curiosity of youth. His profound abstraction was justified by the fascinating marvels of the *Thousand and One Nights,* and by his lyceum pupil's uniform. He was sitting quite still, in a meditative attitude, one elbow on the table and his head resting on one of his hands, whose white fingers were thrust through his dark-brown hair. With the light falling from above upon his face, the rest of his body being in the shadow, he resembled the dark portraits in which Raphael has represented himself, leaning forward in rapt attention, thinking of the future. Between the table and the marchioness, a tall, lovely young girl sat before an embroidery frame, alternately putting forward and withdrawing her head; the light of the lamp was reflected in her artistically dressed jet-black hair. Hélène in herself was a marvelous spectacle. Her beauty was distinguished by a rare combination of character and refinement. Although so arranged as to present sharply marked lines around her head, her hair was so abundant that it resisted the teeth of the comb and curled rebelliously where the neck joined the shoulders. Her eyebrows, which were very thick and regular, were in striking contrast with the pure whiteness of her forehead. She had a few symbols of courage on her upper lip, too, forming a slight dark line beneath a Grecian nose of most exquisitely perfect shape. But the captivating roundness

of outlines, the candid expression of the features, the delicate, transparent carnation of the complexion, the voluptuous fulness of the lips, the perfection of the oval described by the lines of the face, and above all, the sanctity of her virgin glance impressed upon her robust beauty the feminine sweetness, the enchanting modesty that we require in such angels of peace and love as she. There was no sign of frailty, however, in the girl's make-up, and her heart was likely to be as gentle, her soul as strong, as her proportions were magnificent and her face attractive. She imitated the silence of her brother, the student, and was apparently absorbed in the profound maidenly meditation that is often impenetrable to the observation of a father, and indeed to the sagacious instinct of a mother; so that it was impossible to say whether the fitful shadows that passed over her face, like fleecy clouds across a clear sky, should be attributed to the play of the light or to secret suffering.

The two elder children were at that moment completely forgotten by the husband and wife. More than once, however, the general had cast a questioning glance upon the silent scene in the middle distance, which presented a comforting realization of the hopes aroused anew by the childish frolics represented in the foreground of this domestic picture. These various figures, interpreting life by insensible gradations, composed a sort of living poem. The sumptuous accessories in the decorations of the salon, the diversity of attitudes, the

contrasts afforded by clothing of many different colors, by the faces characteristic of the various ages and by the figures sharply defined in the light, spread over those human pages all the rich details demanded of sculptors, painters and authors. Lastly, the silence and the cold, the solitude and the darkness, lent their majesty to the sublime picture of artless innocence, a most enchanting effect of nature. Conjugal life is full of such sacred hours whose indefinable charm is due perhaps to some remembrance of a better world. Celestial beams are shed, doubtless, upon scenes of this sort, which indemnify man for a part of his suffering, and make him resigned to accept life as it is. It seems as if the universe were there, before us, in an entrancing form, that it unfolds its grand scheme of order, that social life pleads for the observance of its laws by speaking of the future.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding the wistful glance Hélène cast at Abel and Moïna when their joyful laughter rang out; notwithstanding the light of happiness upon her speaking face when she glanced furtively at her father, there was every indication of profound melancholy in her movements, in her attitude, and above all in her eyes, veiled by long lashes. Her strong white hands, through which the light seemed to pass, imparting to them a diaphanous, almost impalpable tinge of red—her hands trembled perceptibly. Once only, without concert, did her eyes and the marchioness's meet. The two women at that time exchanged a glance of

mutual understanding, listless and cold but respectful on Hélène's part, dark and threatening on her mother's. Hélène instantly looked down at her embroidery frame, drew her needle hastily in and out, and for a long time did not raise her head, which seemed to have become too heavy for her to carry. Was the mother too harsh to her child, and did she deem that harshness necessary? Was she jealous of Hélène's beauty, which she might still hope to rival, but only by resorting to all the wiles of the toilet? Or had the girl, as many girls do when they reach the discerning age, divined secrets, which this woman, who was to all appearance so religiously faithful to her duties, thought she had buried in her heart as deeply as in a grave?

Hélène had reached an age when purity of soul tends to produce a degree of rigidity that goes beyond the point at which the sentiments should halt. In certain minds, transgressions assume the proportions of crime; the imagination thereupon reacts upon the conscience, and at such times young girls often exaggerate the punishment in proportion to their idea of the offence. Hélène seemed to regard herself as utterly unworthy. A secret of her past life, an accident perhaps, misunderstood at first, but developed by her keen intelligence, influenced by religious ideas, seemed of late to have degraded her to an extraordinary degree in her own eyes. The change in her behavior had begun on the day when she first read Schiller's noble tragedy of *Wilhelm*

Tell in the translation recently issued for the use of theatres in other countries than Germany. After she had scolded her daughter for letting the volume fall, the mother had noticed that the disturbance caused in Hélène's mind by her perusal of the tragedy was due to the scene in which the poet establishes a sort of fraternity between Tell, who sheds one man's blood to save a whole nation, and John the Parricide. Hélène became submissive, pious and thoughtful and no longer desired to attend balls. She was more affectionate to her father than she had ever been, especially when the marchioness was not present to witness her girlish cajolery. And yet, if Hélène's affection for her mother had grown cold, the consequent change in her manner was so slight that the general was not likely to notice it, jealous as he was of any signs of discord in his family. No man would have had a sufficiently keen eye to sound the depths of those two female hearts: one, young and impulsive; the other, sensitive and proud; the first, a treasure of indulgence; the second, overflowing with delicacy and love. If the mother saddened her daughter by an adroit woman's despotism, it was visible to no eyes but the victim's. However, the sequel is responsible for all these insoluble conjectures. Until the night in question, no accusing flash had escaped from those two hearts; but between them and God there was, assuredly, some dark mystery.

"Come, Abel," cried the marchioness, taking advantage of a moment when Moïna and her brother,

exhausted by their play, were sitting still; "come, my dear, you must go to bed."

And with an imperative glance she quickly took him on her knees.

"How is this," said the general, "half-past ten and not one of the servants has returned? Ah! the rascals!—Gustave," he added, turning to his son, "I only gave you that book on condition that you should put it down at ten o'clock; you ought to have closed it of your own accord at that time, and have gone to bed, as you promised me. If you want to make your mark in the world, you must make your word a sort of second religion, and think as much of it as of your honor. Fox, one of the greatest of English orators, was especially remarkable for his nobility of character. Absolute fidelity to his promises was his leading characteristic. In his childhood, his father, an Englishman of the old stock, gave him a lesson that was well calculated to make an everlasting impression on a young boy's mind. When he was about your age, Fox went home to pass his vacation with his father, who had, like all wealthy Englishmen, a park of considerable size around his country house. There was an old summer-house in the park, that was to be pulled down and rebuilt at a spot where there was a magnificent view. Children always enjoy seeing things torn to pieces. Young Fox was anxious to have two or three additional days of vacation so that he could see the fall of the summer-house; but his father insisted on his returning to his school on the

day fixed for the classes to begin; the result was a dispute between the father and son. Like all mammas, the mother took young Fox's part. The father thereupon gave his son his solemn promise that he would wait until the next vacation before pulling down the summer-house.

"Fox returned to school. The father thought that a small boy engrossed in his studies would forget all about it, so he had the summer-house pulled down and rebuilt in the other place. The obstinate boy thought of nothing but the summer-house. When he returned home, his first thought was to go and look at the old building; but he came sadly back to the house at breakfast time and said to his father: 'You deceived me.' The old gentleman, confused, but without losing his dignity, replied: 'It is true, my son, but I will undo the wrong I have done. Every man should think more of his word than his fortune; for to keep to one's word brings fortune, and all the fortune in the world will not efface the stain upon the conscience due to a failure to keep your word.' The father had the old summer-house rebuilt where it was before; and after it was done, he ordered it demolished before his son's eyes. Let this story be a lesson to you, Gustave."

Gustave, who had listened attentively to his father, closed his book instantly. There was a moment's silence during which the general took possession of Moïna, who was struggling against drowsiness, and took her gently in his arms. The little creature let her head fall uncertainly on her

father's breast, and fell sound asleep, enveloped in the golden masses of her lovely hair. At that moment, hurried footsteps were heard in the street and on the turf; and suddenly three blows upon the door woke the echoes of the house. The meaning of those prolonged blows was as easy to understand as the cry of a man whose life is in danger. The watchdog barked furiously. Hélène, Gustave, the general and his wife, were greatly startled; but Abel, whom his mother had just finished undressing, and Moïna, did not awake.

"That man's in a hurry!" cried the old soldier, depositing his daughter on the couch.

He hurried from the salon, not hearing his wife's entreaty:

"My dear, don't go—"

The marquis went to his bedroom, took a pair of pistols, lighted his dark lantern, rushed into the hall and down the stairs with the rapidity of lightning, and soon reached the outer door, whither his son fearlessly followed him.

"Who is there?" he demanded.

"Open," a voice replied, almost stifled by the violent gasping for breath that accompanied it.

"Are you a friend?"

"Yes, a friend."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes—but open, for *they* are coming!"

A man glided through the door with the extraordinary velocity of a ghost, as soon as the general had half opened it; and before he could offer any

resistance, the stranger forced him to let go his hold, as he closed the door with a vigorous kick and leaned resolutely against it as if to prevent its being reopened. The general, as he flashed his lantern upon him and raised his pistol to his breast to overawe him, saw a man of medium height enveloped in a fur-lined pelisse, an old man's garment, of ample dimensions and dragging on the ground, having evidently not been made for him. Whether by chance or as a measure of prudence, the fugitive's brow was entirely covered by a hat that was pulled over his eyes.

"Monsieur," he said to the general, "put down your pistol. I have no purpose to remain in your house without your consent; but, if I go, death awaits me at the barrier. And such a death! you will be responsible for it in God's sight. I ask your hospitality for two hours. Consider, monsieur, that, suppliant as I am, I might command with the despotism of necessity. I ask for Arabian hospitality. May I be sacred in your sight! if not, open, and I will go to my death. Secrecy, shelter and water I must have. Water! oh, water!" he repeated in a dying voice.

"Who are you?" the general demanded, amazed at the feverish volubility with which the stranger spoke.

"Ah! who am I? Very well, open, and I will go," the man replied in a tone of infernal irony.

Despite the skill with which the marquis directed the rays of the lantern, he could see only the lower

part of the face, and there was nothing there to plead in favor of extending the hospitality demanded in such a singular way: the cheeks were trembling and ghastly pale, and the features horribly contracted. In the shadow cast by the hat brim, the eyes gleamed like flames and almost dimmed the feeble light of the candle. However, it was necessary to reply.

"Monsieur," said the general, "your language is so extraordinary, that if you were in my place, you—"

"My life is in your hands!" cried the stranger in a terrible voice, interrupting his host.

"Two hours?" said the marquis in a hesitating tone.

"Two hours!" the man repeated.

But suddenly he pushed back his hat with a desperate gesture, uncovered his forehead, and, as if he were determined to make one last attempt to move the general, darted a keen, penetrating glance at him that seemed to pierce his very soul. That gleam of intelligence and will resembled a flash of lightning and was as crushing as the thunderbolt; for there are moments when men are endowed with inexplicable power.

"Whoever you may be, you will be safe under my roof," rejoined the master of the house, gravely, obeying, as he conceived, one of those instinctive impulses which man cannot always explain.

"May God reward you!" said the stranger, with a long-drawn sigh.

"Are you armed?" the general asked.

By way of reply, the stranger, hardly giving him time to glance at his pelisse, opened it and hastily turned it inside out. He was apparently unarmed and dressed as if he had just left a dancing party. Swift as the suspicious soldier's scrutiny was, he saw enough to make him exclaim:

"Where the devil could you get so splashed in such dry weather?"

"More questions!" retorted the stranger, haughtily.

At that moment, the marquis caught sight of his son and remembered the lesson he had just given him as to the strict observance of one's plighted word; he was so keenly annoyed by the incident, that he said to him, not without a trace of anger in his tone:

"How do you happen to be here, you little rascal, instead of in your bed?"

"Because I thought I might be of some assistance to you in your danger," Gustave replied.

"Go up to your room," said the father, somewhat softened by his son's reply.—"And do you," he said, turning to the stranger, "follow me."

They became as silent as two gamblers who distrust each other. Indeed, the general was beginning to be conscious of some unpleasant presentiments. The stranger already weighed upon his conscience like a nightmare; but, dominated by the sanctity of his oath, he led him through the corridors and up the stairs to a large room on the third floor directly over the salon. It was an unoccupied room used as

a drying-room in winter, communicated with no other room, and had no decoration on its four yellow walls save a wretched mirror left on the mantelpiece by the last owner, and a large pier glass, for which no place was found when the marquis took possession of the house, so that it had been temporarily deposited before the hearth in the room in question. The floor of this vast attic had never been swept, two old, dilapidated chairs were its only furniture, and the atmosphere was freezingly cold. Having placed his lantern on the mantelpiece, the general said to the stranger:

"Your safety requires that this wretched attic be your place of refuge. As you have my pledge of secrecy, you will permit me to lock you in."

The man bowed in token of assent.

"I asked for nothing but shelter, secrecy and water," he observed.

"I will bring you some," the marquis replied; he closed the door carefully and felt his way down to the salon for a light, in order to go himself to the pantry for a carafe of water.

"Well, monsieur, what is it?" the marchioness eagerly asked her husband.

"Nothing, my dear," he replied, coldly.

"But we listened and heard you taking somebody upstairs—"

"Hélène," said the general, looking at his daughter, who raised her eyes to his, "remember that your father's honor depends upon your discretion. You have heard nothing."

The young girl replied with a significant movement of the head. The marchioness remained quite abashed and inwardly annoyed by the manner which her husband had adopted to impose silence upon her. The general procured a carafe and a glass, and returned to the room where his prisoner was; he found him leaning bare-headed against the wall near the fireplace; he had tossed his hat on one of the two chairs. Doubtless he did not expect to be exposed to so bright a light. His brow contracted and his face became careworn when his eyes met the piercing eyes of the general; but he restrained his feelings and assumed a more gracious expression as he thanked his protector. When the latter had placed the glass and the carafe on the mantelpiece, the stranger, after he had cast his flaming eyes around the room once more, broke the silence.

"Monsieur," he said, in a pleasant voice, which bore no trace of its recent guttural convulsions, but which nevertheless indicated some internal trepidation, "I am going to ask a favor that will seem very extraordinary to you. Pardon a caprice that circumstances make necessary. If you remain here, I beg that you will not look at me when I drink."

Vexed at having still to comply with the whims of a man, who was extremely distasteful to him, the general abruptly turned his back on him. The stranger took a white handkerchief from his pocket and wrapped his right hand in it; then he seized

the carafe and drank at one draught all the water it contained. Without realizing that he was breaking his tacit promise, the marquis instinctively looked at the mirror; the two mirrors being so placed with reference to each other that he could see the stranger perfectly, he saw that the handkerchief suddenly became red from contact with his hands, which seemed to be covered with blood.

"Ah! you looked at me," cried the man, looking suspiciously at the general when he had drunk and had wrapped himself once more in his cloak. "I am lost. *They* are coming; here they are!"

"I hear nothing," said the marquis.

"You are not interested, as I am, in listening in space."

"You must have been fighting a duel, to be so covered with blood?" said the marquis, much excited when he distinguished the color of the great wet stains upon his guest's clothes.

"Yes, a duel, you have guessed it," the stranger replied, as a bitter smile played about his lips.

At that moment they heard the hoof beats of several horses galloping in the distance; but the sound was as faint as the first rays of dawn. The general's trained ear detected the regular step of horses disciplined by military drill.

"It's the gendarmerie," he said.

He cast upon his prisoner a glance of a nature to put to flight any suspicions that his involuntary indiscretion might have aroused, and returned to the salon, taking the light with him. He had hardly

had time to place the key to the upper room on the mantelpiece, when the noise made by the cavalry drew near with a rapidity that fairly startled him. In another moment the horses stopped at his door. After exchanging a few words with his companions, one of the riders dismounted, knocked violently on the door, and forced the general to answer his summons. He could not master his secret emotion when his eyes fell upon six gendarmes, whose hats, trimmed with silver lace, glistened in the moonlight.

"Monseigneur," said a brigadier, "didn't you hear a man running toward the barrier not long ago?"

"Toward the barrier? No."

"You haven't opened the door to anyone?"

"Am I in the habit of opening my door myself?"

"But, pardon me, general, at this moment it seems to me—"

"What! what!" cried the marquis angrily, "do you propose to make sport of me? have you any right—?"

"None at all, none at all, monseigneur," replied the brigadier, mildly. "You will excuse our zeal. We know of course that a peer of France doesn't run the risk of opening his doors to an assassin at this time of night; but our anxiety to get some information—"

"An assassin!" cried the general. "Who, then, has been—"

"Monsieur le Baron de Mauny has been killed

with an axe," the gendarme replied. "But we are close on the murderer's heels. We are sure that he's in the neighborhood and we shall run him down. Your pardon, general."

Fortunately the gendarme was remounting as he spoke, so that he could not see the general's face. Being accustomed to imagine all sorts of things, he might perhaps have had his suspicions aroused by the aspect of that open countenance on which the impulses of the mind were so faithfully depicted.

"Do you know the murderer's name?" the general asked.

"No," was the reply. "He left the desk full of gold and banknotes, without touching anything."

"Vengeance, then," said the marquis.

"Nonsense! on an old man?—No, no, the rascal didn't have time to finish his job."

The gendarme galloped off after his companions who were already some distance away. For a moment the general remained in a state of perplexity easy to understand. Soon he heard his servants returning, disputing with some heat, so that their voices could be heard as far away as the Montreuil crossroads. When they arrived, his wrath, which required a pretext for venting itself upon something, burst upon them with the crushing force of a thunderbolt. His voice woke the echoes of the house. Then he as suddenly calmed down, when the boldest and shrewdest of them, his own valet, explained their tardiness by telling him that they had been stopped at the entrance to the town of

Montreuil by gendarmes and police agents in quest of a murderer. The general instantly became mute. Reminded by that statement of the duties of his position, he dryly ordered all his people to go to bed at once, leaving them profoundly astonished at the readiness with which he accepted his valet's falsehood.

But, while these things were happening in the courtyard, an incident, apparently of trivial importance, had changed the situation of the other characters who figure in this narrative. The marquis had no sooner left the room than his wife, glancing first at the key on the mantelpiece and then at Hélène, finally said in a low voice, leaning toward her daughter:

"Hélène, your father left the key on the mantelpiece."

The girl raised her head in amazement and looked timidly at her mother, whose eyes were sparkling with curiosity.

"Well, mamma?" she replied in a disturbed voice.

"I would much like to know what is going on upstairs. If there is anyone there, he hasn't moved. Go—"

"I?" said the girl with something like dismay.

"Are you afraid?"

"No, mamma, but I think I distinguished a man's step."

"If I could go myself, Hélène, I would not ask you to go," rejoined her mother in a tone of cold dignity.

"If your father should return and not find me here, he would look for me perhaps, while he will not notice your absence."

"Madame," replied Hélène, "if you order me to go, I will do it; but I shall lose my father's esteem—"

"Indeed!" retorted the marchioness in an ironical tone. "But, as you take what was intended only as a joke, so very seriously, I order you now to go and see who is upstairs. Here is the key, my child! Your father, when he bade you keep silent as to what is taking place here in his house, did not forbid your going up to that room. Go, and remember that a mother is never to be judged by her daughter."

She uttered these last words with all the severity of an outraged parent, then took the key and handed it to Hélène, who rose and left the room without a word.

"My mother can always find a way to obtain forgiveness, but I shall be ruined forever in my father's esteem. Can it be that she wants to take his affection from me, to drive me from his house?"

These ideas passed suddenly through her mind while she was walking, without a light, along the corridor at the end of which was the door of the mysterious chamber. When she arrived there, her thoughts were sadly perturbed. The sort of confused meditation into which she was plunged, caused innumerable sentiments thus far restrained within her heart, to overflow. Having already, it may be,

ceased to believe in the possibility of a happy future, she definitely despaired of her life at that frightful moment. She trembled convulsively as she put the key in the lock, and her emotion was so overpowering that she stopped for a moment and put her hand to her heart, as if it had the power to calm its loud and violent beating. At last, she opened the door. The creaking of the hinges had evidently appealed in vain to the murderer's ear. Although his hearing was very keen, he stood almost as if glued to the wall, perfectly motionless and apparently lost in thought. The lantern cast only a feeble light upon him, and in that circle of half light he resembled the dismal statues of knights that one always finds standing at the corners of time-blackened tombstones in Gothic chapels. Drops of cold perspiration were rolling down his broad, sallow forehead. Incredible audacity shone in every line of those distorted features. His flaming eyes, dry and staring, seemed to be gazing at a combat in the darkness before him. Tumultuous thoughts passed swiftly across his face, whose firm, decided expression denoted a superior mind. His body, his attitude, his proportions were in full accord with his unruly intellect. He was all strength and power, and he scrutinized the shadows as if they were a veritable image of his future. Accustomed as he was to the energetic features of the giants who thronged about Napoléon, and preoccupied principally by moral curiosity, so to speak, the general had paid no attention to the physical

peculiarities of this extraordinary man; but Hélène, being susceptible, like all women, to external impressions, was deeply impressed by the combination of light and shadow, of grandeur and passion, by a sort of poetic chaos which made the stranger resemble Lucifer rising from his fall. Suddenly, the tempest depicted upon that face was allayed as if by magic, and the indefinable power of which the stranger, unknown to himself perhaps, was the active principle and the effect, was diffused about him with the constantly increasing rapidity of an inundation. A torrent of thoughts flowed from his brow at the moment that his features resumed their natural aspect. *Fascinated*, whether by the strange nature of the interview, or by the mystery into which she was penetrating, the young girl now had an opportunity to admire a mild and most interesting physiognomy. She stood for some time in awed silence, a prey to emotions hitherto unknown to her young heart. But soon, perhaps because Hélène involuntarily moved or uttered an exclamation, perhaps because the assassin, returning from the ideal to the real world, became conscious of another respiration than his own, he turned his head toward his host's daughter, and beheld indistinctly in the shadow, the sublime face and majestic figure of a creature whom he might well have taken for an angel, seeing her as motionless and vaguely outlined as a phantom.

"Monsieur—" said she in a trembling voice.

The murderer started.

"A woman!" he cried softly. "Is it possible? —Go away," he continued. "I recognize no one's right to pity me, to absolve me or to condemn me. I must live my life alone. Go, my child," he added with a regal gesture, "I should ill requite the service the master of this house is doing me, if I allowed a single one of the persons who occupy it to breathe the same air as myself. I must submit to the laws of society."

This last sentence was uttered in a low voice. As his profound intuition completed the mental picture of the miserable future evoked by that depressing thought, he cast a sly glance at Hélène and set in motion in that strange maiden's heart, a train of thought that had hitherto lain sleeping there. It was as if a bright light had illuminated unfamiliar countries. Her heart was completely overthrown, subjugated, before she could find strength to defend herself against the magnetic power of that glance, involuntary though it was. Ashamed and trembling, she left the room and returned to the salon only an instant before her father's return, so that she was unable to say a word to her mother.

The general, deeply preoccupied, paced silently back and forth, with folded arms, from the windows looking on the courtyard to the garden windows. His wife was holding the sleeping Abel. Moïna lay upon the couch, like a bird in its nest, sleeping the untroubled sleep of childhood. The older sister held a silk pin-cushion in one hand and a needle in the other, and was gazing at the fire. The profound

silence that reigned in the salon and throughout the house as well as out of doors, was broken only by the dragging steps of the servants, as they went to bed one by one; by a stifled laugh now and then, the last echo of the nuptial festivities and their pleasure; and by the noise made by the doors of their respective chambers as they held them open, speaking to one another, and then closed them. After that there were some muffled sounds around their beds. A chair fell. An old coachman coughed feebly for a moment. But soon the sombre majesty, characteristic of sleeping nature at midnight, held sway everywhere. The stars alone were shining. The frost had seized upon the earth. Not a living thing spoke or stirred. The fire alone crackled softly as if to emphasize the profoundness of the silence. The clock at Montreuil struck one. At that moment, extremely light steps were heard on the floor above. The marquis and his daughter, certain that Monsieur de Mauny's assassin was safely under lock and key, attributed the sound to one of the women, and were not astonished when they heard the door of the room adjoining the salon open. Suddenly, the murderer appeared in the midst of them. The utter stupefaction of the marquis, the mother's intense curiosity and the daughter's astonishment having made it possible for him to come forward almost to the middle of the salon, he said to the general in a singularly calm and melodious voice:

"Monsieur, the two hours will soon expire."

"You here?" cried the general. "By what power—"

And with a terrible glance, he questioned his wife and children. Hélène became as red as fire.

"You here among us!" continued the old soldier in a tone of intense excitement. "An assassin covered with blood, here! You make a blot upon this picture! Go! go!" he added, in a sort of frenzy.

At the word *assassin*, the marchioness uttered an exclamation. As to Hélène, the word seemed to decide her destiny, and her face did not betray the least astonishment. She seemed to have been expecting the man. Her far-reaching thoughts had a meaning. The punishment decreed by Heaven for her sins was made manifest. Believing herself to be as great a criminal as the man before her, the girl looked at him with a serene expression; she was his companion, his sister. In her eyes, the incident was a manifestation of God's will. A few years later, common sense would have dealt summarily with her remorse; but at that moment it made her mad. The stranger remained unmoved and cold. A smile of disdain played over his features and his full red lips.

"You do but ill requite the nobility of my behavior to you," he said slowly. "I would not touch my hand to the glass in which you gave me water to allay my thirst. I have not even thought of washing my blood-stained hands under your roof, and I go hence, leaving behind me nothing of *my*

crime,"—at those words his lips contracted—"except the idea of it, for I have tried to come and go without leaving a trace. Lastly, I did not even permit your daughter to—"

"My daughter!" cried the general, with a horrified glance at Hélène. "Ah! villain, begone, or I will kill you—"

"The two hours have not expired. You can neither kill me nor give me up without forfeiting your own esteem—and mine."

At that last word the old soldier, utterly dumfounded, tried to meet the criminal's glance; but he was forced to lower his eyes, for he found it impossible to sustain the insupportable brilliancy of a gaze that disorganized his faculties for the second time. He feared that he should abate his severity again, as he realized that his will was already growing weak.

"Murder an old man! Have you never known what it is to have a family?" he said, waving his hand paternally toward his wife and children.

"Yes, an old man," echoed the stranger, and his brow contracted slightly.

"Fly!" cried the general, not venturing to look at his guest. "Our agreement is broken. I will not kill you. No! I will never make myself the purveyor to the scaffold. But go; you fill us with horror."

"I know it," the criminal replied, resignedly. "There is no spot of earth in France where I can safely put my foot; but if justice could, like God,

judge special cases fairly; if it would deign to inquire which of the two is the monster, the assassin or the victim, I should continue to hold up my head among my fellow-men. Do you not feel instinctively that a man who is killed with an axe must have been guilty of crimes in the past? I constituted myself judge and executioner, I filled the place of impotent human justice. That is my crime. Adieu, monsieur. Despite the bitterness with which you have tinctured your hospitality, I shall remember it. I shall retain in my heart a feeling of gratitude toward one man in the world, and you are that man.—But I could have wished that you were more generous."

He walked toward the door. At that moment, Hélène stooped over her mother and said a word in her ear.

"Ah!"

This cry emitted by his wife made the general start as if he had seen Moïna lying dead. Hélène was standing, and the murderer instinctively turned about, his face betraying a sort of anxiety for the family.

"What is it, my dear?" the marquis asked.

"Hélène wants to go with him," was the reply.

The murderer blushed.

"As my mother translates so inaccurately an almost involuntary exclamation," said Hélène in a low voice, "I will gratify her wishes."

After looking about with a glance that was almost fierce in its pride, the girl cast down her eyes

and remained standing in an admirable, modest attitude.

"Hélène," said the general, "did you go up into the room where I put—?"

"Yes, father."

"In that case, it is not natural that you should think of—"

"If it is not natural, at all events it is true, father."

"Ah! my child!" said the marchioness in an undertone, but loud enough for her husband to hear. "Hélène, you are giving the lie to all the principles of honor, modesty and virtue I have tried to develop in your heart. If you have done nothing but act a lie up to this fatal hour, then you are not to be regretted. Is it this stranger's moral perfection that tempts you? is it the sort of power essential to people who commit crime? I esteem you too much to imagine—"

"Oh! imagine anything, madame," Hélène replied, coldly.

But, notwithstanding the force of character she displayed at that moment, the fire that glowed in her eyes could hardly dry the tears in which they were swimming. The stranger guessed the mother's language from the daughter's tears, and fixed his eagle eye upon the marchioness, who was compelled, by an irresistible force, to look up at this redoubtable seducer. And when that woman's eyes met the bright, gleaming eyes of the man who confronted her, she was conscious of an internal

shudder like that which seizes us at the sight of a serpent or when we touch a Leyden jar.

"My dear," she cried to her husband, "he is the evil one himself! He guesses everything—"

The general rose to grasp a bell cord.

"He will destroy you," said Hélène to the murderer.

The stranger smiled, stepped forward, seized the marquis's arm and forced him to endure a glance that benumbed his faculties and deprived him of all energy.

"I propose to pay you for your hospitality," he said, "and we shall be quits. I will save you from dishonor by giving myself up. After all, what can I do on earth now?"

"You can repent," said Hélène, suggesting a hope to him of the sort that shines only in a maiden's eyes.

"I shall never repent," said the murderer in a resonant voice, proudly raising his head.

"His hands are stained with blood," said the father to his daughter.

"I will wash them," said she.

"But," continued the general, without venturing to look toward the stranger, "do you know whether he wants you to do even that?"

The murderer walked toward Hélène, whose beauty, chaste and meditative as it was, seemed to be illuminated by an internal light, whose reflection brightened and placed in relief, so to speak, the slightest features and the most delicate lines; and

after he had bestowed upon the ravishing creature a mild glance, in which there was none the less a fierce flame burning, he said, in a tone indicative of deep emotion:

"Do I not prove that I love you for your own sake, and at the same time pay for the two hours of existence your father has sold me, by refusing to accept your devotion?"

"And you, you too repulse me!" cried Hélène, in a heartrending tone. "Then adieu to all; I am going to die!"

"What does this mean?" said her father and mother, with one voice.

She made no reply, but lowered her eyes, after she had bestowed an eloquent glance upon the marchioness. From the moment that the general and his wife had tried to contest by word or deed, the extraordinary privilege that the stranger arrogated to himself, of remaining among them, at which time he had flashed upon them the dazzling light that streamed from his eyes, they had seemed to be in a state of inexplicable torpor: and their benumbed reasoning power afforded them but little assistance in repelling the supernatural power under which they succumbed. The air seemed heavy to them, and they breathed with difficulty, but they could find no words with which to accuse the man who oppressed them thus, although an interior voice left them in no doubt that the sorcerer was the moving cause of their powerlessness. In the midst of his mental suffering, the general realized that his efforts

should be aimed at influencing his daughter's wavering reason: he put his arm around her waist and led her to a window recess, at some distance from the murderer.

"My dear child," said he in an undertone, "if some strange passion has suddenly been born in your heart, your innocent life and your pure, devout mind have afforded me too many proofs of the elevation of your character for me to suppose that you have not the necessary strength of will to subdue a mad impulse. Therefore, there must be some mystery behind your conduct. Even so, my heart is overflowing with indulgent feeling and you can safely confide everything to it; even if you should rend it, my child, I should be strong to conceal my suffering and maintain absolute silence touching your secret. Tell me, are you jealous of our fondness for your brothers or your little sister? Have you had any disappointment in love that is weighing on your heart? Are you unhappy here? Come, tell me the reasons that induce you to leave your family, to abandon us and deprive us of the greatest charm of our lives, to leave your mother and your brothers and your little sister!"

"I am not jealous of anybody, father," she replied, "nor in love with anybody, not even your friend Monsieur de Vandenesse, the diplomatist."

The marchioness turned pale, and her daughter, who was watching her, changed the subject.

"Mustn't I go and live under some man's protection, sooner or later?"

"True."

"Do we ever know," she continued, "to what human being our destiny unites us? I believe in this man."

"Child," said the general, raising his voice, "you don't consider all the suffering that is certain to fall to your lot."

"I think of his suffering."

"What a life!" said the father.

"The life of a true wife," murmured the girl.

"You know a great deal about it!" cried the marchioness, recovering the use of her tongue.

"Madame, questions call forth replies; but, if you wish, I will speak more clearly."

"Say whatever you choose, my daughter—I am a mother."

At that point, the daughter glanced at her mother, and the glance caused the marchioness to change her tone.

"Hélène, I will submit to your reproaches, if you have anything to reproach me for, rather than see you follow a man whom the world avoids in horror."

"You see, madame, that without me he would be alone."

"Enough, madame!" cried the general; "we have more than one daughter, have we not?"

And he glanced at Moïna, who was still asleep.

"I will shut you up in a convent," he added, turning to Hélène.

"Very well, father," she replied with the calmness

of desperation; "I shall die there. You are responsible for my life and *his* soul to God only."

A profound silence succeeded her last words. The various participants in this scene, in which everything outraged the ordinary proprieties of social life, did not dare to look at one another. Suddenly the marquis noticed his pistols, seized one of them, cocked it hastily and pointed it at the stranger. At the noise made by the hammer, the man turned and fixed his calm, piercing eyes upon the general, whose arm, relaxed by a weakness he could not control, fell heavily to his side and the pistol rolled upon the carpet.

"My daughter," said the father, overcome by this fearful struggle, "you are free. Embrace your mother, if she consents. For my own part, I never want to see or hear of you again."

"Hélène," said the mother, thereupon, "remember that you will be poor and miserable."

A sound not unlike the death rattle attracted attention to the stranger. His face wore a disdainful expression.

"The hospitality I have given you costs me dear," cried the general, rising. "You murdered an old man a short time ago; now you are murdering a whole family. Whatever happens, there will be woe in this house."

"But suppose your daughter is happy?" queried the murderer, gazing steadfastly at his host.

"If she is happy with you," replied the father with a superhuman effort, "I shall not regret her."

Hélène knelt timidly at her father's feet and said to him in a caressing voice:

"O father, I love and respect you, whether you lavish the treasures of your kindness upon me or the harsh treatment due to one who has disgraced herself. But I implore you, do not let your last words be words of anger."

The general did not venture to look at her. At that moment, the stranger stepped forward and said, glancing at Hélène with a smile in which there was something infernal and divine at once:

"Angel of pity, for whom a murderer has no fears, come, since you persist in entrusting your destiny to me."

"Incredible!" cried the father.

The marchioness bestowed a glance of most extraordinary meaning upon her daughter and opened her arms. Hélène rushed into them, weeping.

"Adieu," she said, "adieu, mother!"

She boldly made a motion to the stranger, who started violently. Having kissed her father's hand and embraced Moina and Abel hastily, and without apparent pleasure, she disappeared with the stranger.

"Which way have they gone?" cried the general, listening to the steps of the two fugitives.—"Madame," he added, addressing his wife, "I feel as if I were dreaming: there is some mystery behind this adventure. You must know what it is."

The marchioness shuddered.

"Your daughter has been singularly romantic and

excitable for some time past," she replied. "Notwithstanding all the pains I have taken to combat this tendency on her part—"

"That is not clear—"

But the general, imagining that he heard his daughter's footsteps and the stranger's in the garden, interrupted himself to rush to the window and throw it open.

"Hélène!" he cried.

But his voice was lost in the darkness like a vain prophecy. As he pronounced that name, to which nobody on earth would answer again, the general broke, as if by enchantment, the spell that some diabolical power had laid upon him. A sort of flash of intelligence passed over his face. He saw clearly the scene that had just taken place and cursed his weakness, which he could not understand. A hot flush ran from his heart to his head and to his feet; he became himself once more, terrible, thirsting for vengeance, and uttered a frightful cry:

"Help! help!"

He ran to the bell cords and pulled them as if he would drag them down, causing an extraordinary jangling of bells all over the house. All his servants awoke with a start. He himself, still shouting, opened the windows looking on the street, called for the gendarmes, found his pistols and discharged them to accelerate the speed of the officers, the rising of his servants and the coming of the neighbors. The dogs recognized their master's voice and barked furiously, the horses neighed and

stamped. It made a hideous uproar in the silence of the calm night. As he hurried down the stairway to run after his daughter, the general saw his people rushing in dismay from all directions.

"My daughter—Hélène has been abducted. Go into the garden! Watch the street! Open the door to the gendarmes!—After the assassin!"

He broke, with the strength of madness, the chain that fastened the great watchdog.

"Hélène! Hélène!" he shouted to him.

The dog leaped like a lion, barked fiercely and darted into the garden so rapidly that the general could not keep up with him. At that moment, horses galloping were heard in the street and the general made haste to open the door himself.

"Brigadier," he cried, "cut off the retreat of Monsieur de Mauny's assassin! They are escaping through my garden. Quick, guard the roads around the Butte de Picardie.—I am going to beat up all the fields and parks and houses.—Do you," he said to his own people, "watch the street and form a line from the barrier to Versailles. Forward, all!"

He seized a gun that his footman brought him and rushed into the garden, crying to the dog:

"Seek them!"

A furious barking answered in the distance, and he made off in the direction from which the dog's hoarse voice seemed to come.

At seven o'clock in the morning, the search of the gendarmes and the general, his people and his neighbors had had no result. The dog had not

returned. Worn out with fatigue, and prematurely aged by sorrow, the marquis returned to his salon, thenceforth a desert in his eyes, although his other children were there.

"You were very cold to your daughter!" he said, looking at his wife. "That's all we have left of her!" he added, pointing to the embroidery frame, on which he spied a flower just begun. "She was there so short a time ago, and now, lost—lost!"

He wept, hid his face in his hands, and was silent for a moment, afraid to look about at the salon, which recently afforded such a lovely picture of domestic happiness. The first rays of dawn were struggling with the expiring lamps; the candles were consuming their festoons of paper; everything was in accord with the father's despair.

"We must destroy that," he said after a moment's silence, pointing to the frame. "I can't endure to see anything that reminds us of her."

That terrible Christmas night, during which the marquis and his wife had the misfortune to lose their oldest daughter, powerless as they were to oppose the extraordinary power of domination exerted by her involuntary abductor, was like a warning given them by Destiny. The failure of a stockbroker ruined the marquis. He mortgaged his wife's property to enter into a speculation, the profits of which were to restore to his family all their original fortune; but the enterprise completed his ruin. Impelled by desperation to try every possible expedient, the general expatriated himself. Six

years had passed since his departure. Although his family had heard from him but rarely, he announced his approaching return to France a few days before the freedom of the South American republics was recognized by Spain.

So it happened that on a certain lovely morning, he, with several French merchants, impatient to return to their native country with the wealth acquired by hard labor and perilous voyages in Mexico or Colombia, found themselves upon a Spanish brig, a few leagues from Bordeaux. One man, who appeared far older than his years warranted, as a result of exhausting toil or of grief, was leaning against the bulwarks, apparently insensible to the spectacle presented to the gaze of the other passengers who were grouped upon the deck. Rejoiced to feel that the dangers of the voyage were past, and tempted by the beauty of the day, they had all left the cabin, as if to salute their native land. Most of them were anxious to have pointed out to them, in the distance, the various lighthouses, the towns of Gascogne, the Tour de Cordouan, mingled with the fantastic creations of the clouds that lay along the horizon. Except for the silvery coast line that sparkled in the sun ahead of the brig and the long wake, rapidly effaced, that it left astern, the travelers might have fancied that they were motionless in the middle of the ocean, the sea was so calm. The heavens were enchantingly beautiful. Their deep blue blended, by insensible gradations, with the blue waters, the point of junction being marked

by a sparkling line as brilliant as the stars. The sun was reflected in millions of faces in the vast expanse of sea, so that the wide plains of water were more luminous perhaps than the boundless fields of the firmament. The brig's sails were filled by a wind of marvelous softness, and the great folds of snowy canvas, the yellow flags fluttering aloft, and the labyrinth of rigging were sharply outlined against the brilliant background of sky and ocean, untinged by any shade of color other than the shadows cast by the phantom-like sails. A lovely day, a fresh wind, a tranquil sea, the melancholy plashing of the waves, the fatherland in sight, and a graceful, solitary brig, gliding over the ocean like a woman hurrying to a rendezvous, all combined to make a harmonious picture, a scene wherein the human mind might embrace illimitable space, starting from a point where all is movement. There was a marvelous contrast of solitude with life, of silence with vague sounds, and no one could say where to look for the noise and life, or for the solitude and silence; nor did a human voice break the divine charm. The Spanish captain, his crew and the French passengers sat or stood about, all alike absorbed in devout contemplation, their minds overflowing with reminiscences. There was indolence in the very air. The happy faces denoted complete forgetfulness of past ills, and their owners swayed this way and that with the motion of the ship, as in a golden dream. But, from time to time, the old passenger, leaning against the bulwarks,

gazed at the horizon with a sort of anxious longing. Distrust of fate was written in his every feature, and he seemed to fear that he should never reach the shores of France in time. That man was the marquis. Fortune had not been deaf to the cries and struggles of his despair. After five years of laborious effort and painful toil, he had found himself once more the possessor of a considerable fortune. In his impatience to see his country once more and to bring happiness to his family, he had followed the example of certain French merchants in Havana, by taking passage with them upon a Spanish vessel with a cargo for Bordeaux. His imagination, worn out with foreseeing disaster, drew the most delightful pictures of his past good fortune. As he gazed from afar at the shimmering coast line, he fancied that he was looking at his wife and children. He was in his place by the fireside, and could feel their caresses and their arms about him. He drew a mental picture of Moïna, grown tall and beautiful, an imposing young woman. When this fanciful picture had taken on a sort of reality, tears gathered in his eyes; and, as if to hide his distress, he turned and looked at the misty horizon, away from the hazy line that marked the shore.

"It is he—he is following us!" he said.

"What's that?" cried the Spanish captain.

"A sail," the general replied, in an undertone.

"I saw the same fellow yesterday," rejoined Captain Gomez.

He cast a questioning glance at the Frenchman.

"He is giving chase to us," he said in the general's ear.

"I don't know why he hasn't overhauled us," retorted the old soldier, "for he sails much faster than your damned *Saint-Ferdinand*."

"He must have had some disaster, sprung a leak perhaps—"

"He's gaining on us!" cried the Frenchman.

"He's a Colombian privateer," said the captain in his ear. "We are still six leagues from shore and the wind is failing us."

"He isn't sailing, he's flying, as if he knew that his prey will have escaped him in two hours. What an audacious fellow!"

"Audacious!" cried the captain. "Ah! he doesn't call his craft the *Othello* without reason. He sunk a Spanish frigate only a short time ago, and he only carries thirty guns! I was more afraid of him than anything else, for I knew he was cruising in the Antilles.—Aha!" he continued after a moment's pause, during which he was watching his sails, "the wind is freshening and we shall make port. We must, for the Parisian would have no mercy on us."

"He will make port before us!" the marquis replied.

The *Othello* was not more than three leagues distant. Although the crew had not overheard the conversation between the marquis and Captain Gomez, the sudden appearance of the sail astern had attracted most of the seamen and passengers to the spot where the two were standing; but as

almost all of them took her for a merchant vessel, they were watching her approach with interest, when suddenly a sailor exclaimed in forcible language: "By Saint-Jacques! it's all up with us; there's the Parisian captain!"

At that terrible name, the brig's crew were panic-stricken, and a scene of indescribable confusion ensued. The Spanish captain succeeded in imparting courage to his men for the moment by his brave words; and, in face of the impending danger, determined to make the land at any cost, he ordered all the upper and lower studding-sails to be set, in order to present to the wind every stitch of canvas with which his vessel was provided. But his orders were obeyed with great difficulty; naturally, there was none of the precision that we admire so much in the working of a man-of-war. Although the *Othello* flew over the water like a swallow, thanks to the trim of her sails, she gained so little, apparently, that the ill-fated Frenchmen indulged in pleasing but illusory hopes. Suddenly, just as the *Saint-Ferdinand*, after incredible efforts, seemed to take a new flight as a result of the skilful manœuvring in which Gomez had assisted by voice and gesture, the helmsman, purposely no doubt, threw the helm the wrong way and hove the brig to. The sails met the wind from the other side so suddenly that she was taken aback; the studding-sail booms snapped and she was completely helpless for the moment. Indescribable rage rendered the captain whiter than his sails; at a single bound, he sprang

upon the helmsman and aimed a blow at him with his dagger, so furiously that he missed him but hurled him into the sea; then he seized the helm and tried to remedy the frightful confusion that transfigured his noble, gallant ship. Tears of despair rolled down his cheeks; for we are more disturbed by treachery that prevents our skill from attaining its results, than by imminent danger of death. But the more the captain swore, the less progress was made. He fired an alarm gun with his own hand, hoping to be heard on shore. At that moment, the pirate, who was coming up with distressing rapidity, answered with a shot that fell within ten yards of the *Saint-Ferdinand.*

"Thunder!" cried the general, "how that gun was aimed! He carries carronades made for his purposes."

"Oh! when he speaks, you know, the rest of us must hold our tongues. The Parisian wouldn't sheer away from an English ship."

"It's all over with us!" cried the captain in a despairing tone, for with his telescope he could see nothing standing out from shore. "We are farther from France than I thought."

"Why do you lose courage?" said the general. "Your passengers are all Frenchmen, and they chartered your ship. This privateer is a Parisian, you say? Very good, hoist the white flag and—"

"And he'll sink us," the captain replied. "Isn't he of any nationality that circumstances require, when he wants to seize a rich prey?"

"Ah! if he's a pirate—"

"A pirate!" said one of the seamen with a terrified air. "Ah! he's always within the law, or has a way of making it appear that he is."

"Very well," cried the general, raising his eyes heavenward, "let us be resigned to the worst."

And he still had sufficient force of will to restrain his tears.

As he spoke, a second shot, better aimed than the first, struck the brig's hull and passed clear through her.

"Bring her to," said the captain sadly.

And the seaman who had upheld the Parisian's honesty, assisted most intelligently in this desperate manœuvre. For a mortal half-hour, the crew waited in most profound consternation. The *Saint-Ferdinand* was carrying four millions in piastres, which composed the whole fortune of five of the passengers, the general's amounting to eleven hundred thousand francs. At last the *Othello*, having come up within ten musket shots, showed distinctly the yawning mouths of twelve guns ready to fire. It seemed as if she were driven along by a wind produced by the devil expressly for her; but the practised eye of a sailor could readily understand her speed. It was enough to cast a glance at the brig's high, raking masts, her fine lines, her narrow beam, the cut of her canvas, the wonderful lightness of her rigging, and the ease with which her crew, working together like one man, maintained in perfect trim the white surface presented by her sails. Everything combined

to indicate the security of conscious power in the slender wooden creature, as swift and intelligent as a race-horse or a bird of prey. The crew of the privateer were standing silent at their posts, ready, in case of resistance, to devour the poor merchant vessel, which, luckily for itself, lay quietly by, like a schoolboy detected in wrong-doing by his teacher.

"We have guns!" cried the general, pressing the Spanish captain's hand.

The captain darted a glance instinct with courage and despair at the old soldier, saying:

"And men?"

The marquis looked at the crew of the *Saint-Ferdinand* and shuddered. The four merchants were pale and trembling, while the sailors, standing in a group around one of their number, seemed to be concerting measures for making common cause with the *Othello*, and watched the privateer with greedy curiosity. The boatswain, the captain and the marquis alone exchanged courageous thoughts as their eyes met.

"Ah! Captain Gomez, I bade adieu to my country and my family long ago, with the bitterness of death at my heart; must I leave them again just as I am returning to bring joy and happiness to my children?"

The general turned to drop a tear of rage into the sea, and spied the helmsman swimming toward the privateer.

"This time," replied the captain, "you will doubtless bid them adieu forever."

The Frenchman alarmed the Spaniard by the horrified glance with which he received his words. At that moment, the two vessels were almost side by side; and when his eye fell upon the privateer's crew, the general had faith in Gomez's prophecy of disaster. Three men were standing at each gun. By reason of their athletic posture, their rigid features, their bare, muscular arms, they might have been taken for bronze statues. They might have been killed without being overthrown. The sailors, well armed, active, nimble and powerful, stood motionless at their stations. Their determined faces were burned almost black by the sun and hardened by exposure. Their eyes gleamed like so many sparks of fire, and denoted keen intelligence and infernal joy. The profound silence that reigned on the deck, black as it was with men and hats, was most eloquent of the rigid discipline that forced those human demons to bend beneath the yoke of a powerful will. The leader stood at the foot of the mainmast, without weapons and with folded arms; an axe lay at his feet. As a protection against the sun, he wore a broad-brimmed felt hat that kept his face in shadow. Like dogs lying at their master's feet, gunners, soldiers and sailors gazed at their captain and at the merchantman in turn. When the two brigs came together, the shock aroused the privateer from his reverie, and he said a word or two in the ear of a young officer who stood within two steps of him.

"Ready to board her!" cried the lieutenant.

And the *Saint-Ferdinand* was made fast to the *Othello* with marvelous promptitude. In compliance with the orders given in an undertone by the privateer and repeated by the lieutenant, the men detailed for each duty went aboard the prize, like monks marching to mass, to bind the crew and passengers and secure the treasure. In a moment, the kegs of piastres, the supplies and the crew of the *Saint-Ferdinand* were transported to the deck of the *Othello.* The general fancied that he was dreaming when his hands were bound behind him and he was tossed upon a bale as if he were himself a piece of merchandise. A conference was held by the privateer, his lieutenant and one of the sailors who seemed to fill the post of boatswain. When the discussion, which was very brief, was at an end, the boatswain blew his whistle; at the word of command, the men leaped aboard the *Saint-Ferdinand,* clambered up the rigging, and began to strip her of her yards and sails and top-hamper with as much speed as a soldier exhibits on the battlefield in undressing a dead comrade whose shoes and cape have aroused his greed.

"We are lost," said the Spanish captain coolly to the marquis, after watching the gestures of the three leaders during their deliberations, and the movements of the sailors as they proceeded to strip his brig in due form.

"How so?" asked the marquis as coolly.

"What do you suppose they will do with us?" replied the Spaniard. "They undoubtedly realize

that they would find it hard to sell the *Saint-Ferdinand* in a French or Spanish port, so they will sink her in order to get her off their hands. As for us, do you imagine they'll burden themselves with our support, when they don't know what their next port may be?"

The captain had hardly finished speaking, when the general heard a horrible outcry, followed by the dull splash caused by the fall of several bodies into the sea. He turned and could not discover the four merchants. Eight fierce-looking gunners still had their arms in the air when the horrified general looked up at them.

"What did I tell you?" said the Spanish captain coolly.

The general sprung to his feet; the sea was smooth once more and he could not distinguish the place where his wretched companions had been swallowed up; they were at that moment going down, down through the water, bound hand and foot, if the sharks had not already devoured them. A few steps away, the treacherous helmsman and the sailor from the *Saint-Ferdinand* who sang the Parisian captain's praises, were fraternizing with the privateersmen, and pointing out to them those of the brig's crew whom they considered worthy of being incorporated in the crew of the *Othello;* two cabin boys were binding the feet of the others, despite their horrible oaths. When the selection had been made, the eight gunners seized the doomed men and tossed them unceremoniously over the side.

The privateersmen watched with infernal interest the different ways in which these men made the plunge, and their grimaces and dying struggles; but their faces betrayed neither mockery nor astonishment nor pity. It was to them a simple every-day incident to which they seemed accustomed. The older men preferred to feast their eyes, with a sombre, glassy smile, on the casks filled with piastres, piled at the foot of the mainmast. The general and Captain Gomez, seated on a bale, consulted each other in silence with glances almost devoid of expression. They were soon the only survivors of the *Saint-Ferdinand's* living freight. The seven sailors selected by the two spies from among the Spaniards, had already joyously transformed themselves into Peruvians.

"What damnable villains!" cried the general, suddenly, his noble, generous indignation causing him to forget prudence and grief alike.

"They obey necessity," replied Gomez, coolly. "If you should ever meet one of those fellows again, wouldn't you run your sword through him?"

"Captain," said the lieutenant, accosting the Spaniard, "the Parisian has heard of you. You are, he says, the only man who knows the channels in the Antilles and on the Brazilian coast. Do you care to—!"

The captain interrupted him with a scornful exclamation, and replied:

"I will die like a sailor, like a true-hearted Spaniard, like a Christian—do you understand?"

"Over with him!" cried the young man.

At the word, two gunners laid hold of Gomez.

"You are cowards!" cried the general, attempting to stop them.

"Don't go too far, old fellow," said the lieutenant. "Although your red ribbon has made some impression on our captain, I snap my fingers at it. We'll have a little talk together before long."

At that moment, a loud splash, unaccompanied by anything in the nature of a complaint, told the general that the brave Gomez had died like a sailor.

"My fortune or death!" he cried in a frightful paroxysm of rage.

"Ah! you're very reasonable!" retorted the privateer with a sneering laugh. "Now you are sure of obtaining something from us."

At a sign from the lieutenant, two sailors came forward to bind the Frenchman's feet; but he, with unexpected bravery, pushed them away, drew the lieutenant's sword with a swift motion he was very far from anticipating, and began to brandish it like an old cavalry officer who knew his trade.

"Ah! scoundrel," he said, "you are not going to throw one of Napoléon's old campaigners into the sea, as you would an oyster!"

Pistol shots, fired almost point-blank at the recalcitrant Frenchman, attracted the attention of the Parisian, who was engaged in overseeing the transshipment of the rigging he had ordered taken from the *Saint-Ferdinand.* Without excitement, he came up behind the gallant general, drew him rapidly

away toward the bulwarks and prepared to throw him into the water like a useless spar. At that moment, the general met the piercing eye of his daughter's abductor. The father and son-in-law recognized each other instantly. The captain, twisting the marquis around and pushing him in the other direction, as if he weighed nothing at all, placed him at the foot of the mainmast instead of tossing him into the sea. A murmur arose on the deck; but the privateer cast one glance at his men and the most profound silence reigned.

"It is Hélène's father," he exclaimed, in a firm, ringing voice. "Woe to the man who does not respect him!"

A chorus of joyous acclamations arose and mounted heavenward from the deck, like a prayer, or like the first notes of the *Te Deum.* The boys danced about in the rigging, the sailors threw their caps in the air, the gunners stamped on the deck, all hands howled and whistled and swore. This mad way of expressing delight made the general anxious and dejected. Attributing their action to some ghastly mystery, his first words, when he recovered the power of speech, were: "My daughter! where is my daughter?" The privateer bestowed upon him one of those penetrating glances of his, which, for some unexplained reason, always wrought havoc in the bravest hearts; it imposed silence upon him, to the great satisfaction of the sailors, who were happy to see their leader's power exerted over everybody. He then led him to a companion way

and down the steps to the door of a stateroom which he hastily pushed open, saying:

"There she is!"

With that he disappeared, leaving the old soldier in a sort of stupor at the picture presented to his eyes. When she heard the stateroom door suddenly thrown open, Hélène rose from the couch on which she was lying; but she saw the marquis and uttered a cry of amazement. She was so changed that no eyes but a father's could have recognized her. The sun of the tropics had embellished her pale face with a rich shade of brown, of marvelous beauty, which gave it a poetic Oriental cast, and it breathed an air of grandeur, of majestic firmness, of depth of sentiment by which the most vulgar mind must have been impressed. Her long, luxuriant hair, falling in thick curls over the whole curve of her neck, added another element of power to the becoming pride of her face. In her attitude and her gestures, Hélène exhibited her consciousness of her power. Triumphant satisfaction inflated slightly her pink nostrils, and tranquil happiness was written in every detail of her beauty. There was in her an indefinable suggestion of virgin purity combined with that sort of haughtiness characteristic of those who are dearly loved. Slave and sovereign at once, she was willing to obey because it was in her power to reign. She was dressed with charming and refined magnificence. Indian muslin was the principal material of her costume; but her couch and the cushions were of cashmere and a Persian

carpet covered the floor of the capacious cabin; her four children were playing at her feet, building outlandish castles with pearl necklaces, precious stones and valuable trinkets of all sorts. Vases of Sèvres porcelain, painted by Madame Jaquotot, were filled with rare flowers that perfumed the air; there were Mexican jasmines and camellias, and among them tiny South American birds, quite tame, flew in and out, like animated rubies and sapphires and flakes of gold. There was a piano in the room, and against the wooden walls, hung with red silk, were pictures, of small dimensions but from the hands of the best painters: a *Sunset* by Hippolyte Schinner hung beside a Terburg; one of Raphael's *Virgins* contested the supremacy in poetic charm with a sketch by Géricault; a Gérard Dow eclipsed the portrait painters of the Empire. Upon a table of Chinese lacquer work was a golden plate filled with delicious fruit. In short, Hélène seemed like the queen of a vast country, as she sat in the boudoir in which her crowned lover had collected the loveliest productions of the earth. The children looked up at their grandfather with eyes of piercing brightness; and, accustomed as they were to live in the midst of battle, tempest and uproar, they resembled the young Romans, deeply interested in war and bloodshed, whom David has represented in his picture of *Brutus*.

"How can it be?" cried Hélène, grasping her father as if to make sure of the reality of the vision.

"Hélène!"

ON BOARD THE SAINT-FERDINAND

*The father and son-in-law recognized each other instantly. The captain, twisting the marquis around and pushing him in the other direction, as if he weighed nothing at all, placed him at the foot of the mainmast instead of tossing him into the sea. A murmur arose on the deck. * * **

"It is Hélène's father," he exclaimed, in a firm, ringing voice. "Woe to the man who does not respect him!"

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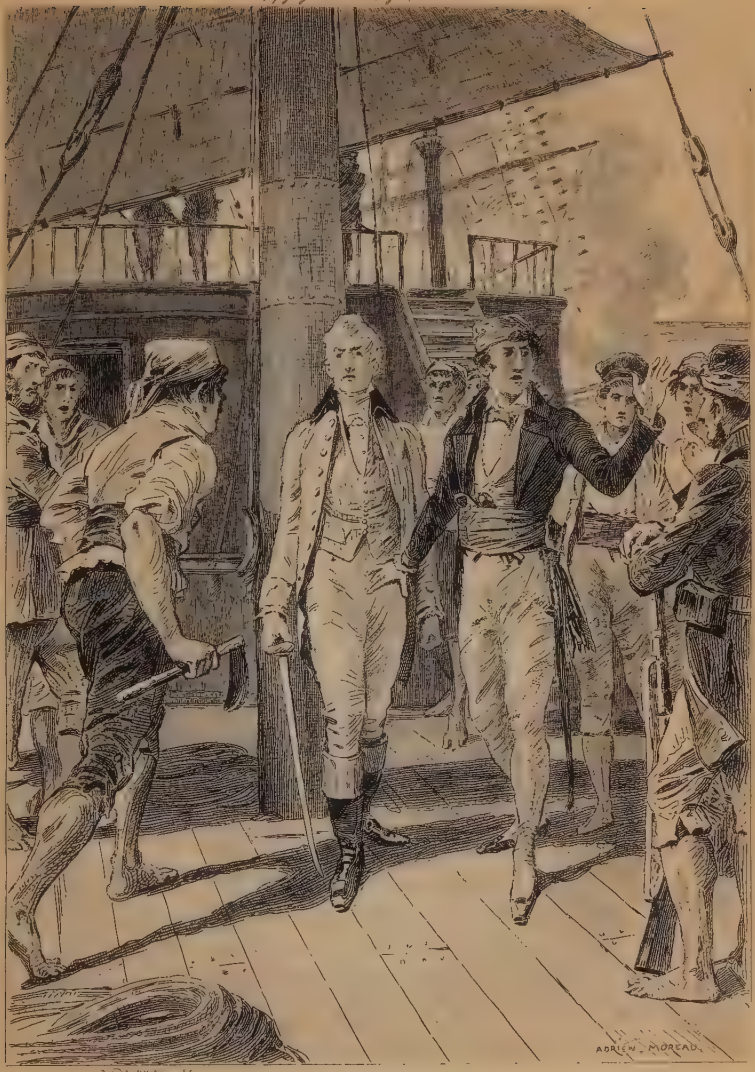

"Father!"

They fell into each other's arms, and the old man's embrace was not the stronger or the more loving.

"You were on that vessel?"

"Yes," he replied sadly, seating himself on the couch and looking at the children, who were grouped about him, watching him with innocent curiosity. "I should have died except for—"

"Except for my husband," she interrupted him, "I understand."

"Ah!" cried the general, "why need I find you thus, my Hélène, you for whom I have wept so bitterly! I must still lament over your destiny."

"Why so?" she asked with a smile. "Will it not please you to learn that I am the happiest of wives?"

"Happy?" he cried, leaping from his seat in surprise.

"Yes, my dear father," she replied, taking hold of his hands, kissing them, pressing them against her palpitating bosom, and in addition to all this cajolery, holding her head in a significant way that was emphasized by the expression of her eyes, which were fairly sparkling with pleasure.

"How can that be?" he asked, curious to know the story of his daughter's life, and forgetting everything else in face of her resplendent beauty.

"Listen, father," said she; "I have for my lover, husband, servant, master, a man whose heart is as vast as this boundless sea, as fertile in gentleness as the heavens, a god, in short! For seven years

past, not a word, a sentiment, a gesture has ever escaped him that could by any possibility produce a discordant note in the divine harmony of his words, his caresses and his love. He has always looked at me with an affectionate smile on his lips and a joyful gleam in his eye. Up yonder, on the deck, his voice of thunder often rises above the roaring of the tempest and the tumult of battle; but here it is as soft and melodious as the music of Rossini, whose works he gives me. Everything that a woman's caprice can invent, I obtain. Indeed my wishes are often exceeded. In short, I reign upon the sea, and I am obeyed there as a sovereign might be.—Oh! happy!" she added, interrupting herself, "happy is not the word to express my good fortune. I share the fate of all women! To feel an immense passion, boundless devotion to the man one loves, and to find in *his* heart an infinitude of sentiment in which a woman's heart loses itself and forever! tell me, is that happiness? I have already consumed a thousand existences. Here I am alone, here I command. Never has a creature of my sex placed her foot on this noble vessel, where Victor is always within a few steps of me.—He cannot go farther from me than from the bow to the stern," she continued, with a sly and mischievous expression. "Seven years! is a love that resists this perpetual joy, that sustains this ever-recurring test for seven years—is that love? No! oh! no, it is better than anything else I know in life. Human language has no words to express celestial happiness."

A torrent of tears escaped from her flashing eyes. The four children thereupon uttered a plaintive shriek, ran to her like chickens to their mother, and the eldest struck the general and glared threateningly at him.

"Abel, my angel," said she, "I am weeping with joy."

She took him on her knees and the child kissed her and passed his arm familiarly around her majestic neck, like a lion's whelp playing with its mother.

"And you are never tired of it?" cried the general, dumfounded by his daughter's passionate response.

"Yes," she replied, "when we go on shore; and even then I never leave my husband."

"But you are fond of parties, balls, music?"

"His voice is my music; my parties are the occasions when I wear the toilets I invent for him. When one of them pleases him, is it not as if the whole world admired me? That is the only reason why I do not throw into the sea these diamonds, these necklaces and diadems of precious stones, these trinkets, these flowers, these masterpieces of art which he lavishes on me, saying: 'Hélène, as you don't go into society, I propose that society shall come to you.'"

"But there are men on this ship, audacious, terrible men, whose passions—"

"I understand you, father," she said, with a smile. "Have no fear on that score. Never was

empress surrounded with more consideration than I receive. These men are superstitious; they believe that I am the tutelary genius of this vessel, of their undertakings, of their success. But *he* is their god! One day, a single time only, a sailor failed in due respect to me—in words," she added, laughing. "Before Victor had heard of it, the rest of the crew threw him into the sea, although I forgave him. They love me as their good angel, I nurse them when they are sick, and I have had the good fortune to save some of them from death by dint of caring for them with a woman's perseverance. The poor fellows are giants and babies at once."

"And when there is a battle?"

"I am used to it," she replied. "I have never trembled since the first one. Now my heart is inured to the danger, and indeed—I am your daughter and I love it."

"And if he should die?"

"I should die too."

"And your children?"

"They are sons of the Ocean and of danger; they share their parents' lives. Our existence is one and cannot be divided. We all live the same lives, all written on the same page, borne by the same boat, and we know it."

"You love him then so dearly as to prefer him to all else?"

"To all else," she repeated. "But let us not try to fathom the mystery. See! this dear child in my arms is another *he!*"

With that she embraced Abel with extraordinary violence, and passionately kissed his cheeks and hair.

"But," cried the general, "I cannot forget that he has just ordered nine persons to be thrown into the sea."

"He was obliged to do it, beyond question," she replied, "for he is humane and generous. He sheds as little blood as is consistent with the preservation and the interests of the little world he has taken under his protection and the sacred cause he defends. Speak to him of the things that seem to you wrong, and you will see that he will know how to make you change your opinion."

"And his crime?" said the general, as if he were speaking to himself.

"But suppose it were a virtue?" she retorted with cool dignity; "suppose the justice of mankind had failed to avenge him?"

"But to avenge himself!" cried the general.

"And what is hell," she demanded, "if it is not never-ending vengeance for the faults of a day?"

"Ah! you are lost. He has bewitched you, abandoned girl. You are mad."

"Remain here one day, father, and if you choose to listen to him and watch him, you will love him."

"Hélène," said the general gravely, "we are only a few leagues from France."

She started, looked out through the porthole of her cabin, and pointed to the vast green plains of water rolling away as far as the eye could reach.

"There is my country," she replied, tapping her foot on the carpet.

"But won't you come to see your mother and sister and brothers?"

"Oh! yes," said she in a sobbing voice, "if he is willing and can go with me."

"Do you mean that you no longer have anything of your own, Hélène, country or family," rejoined the old soldier sternly.

"I am his wife," she replied proudly, with a noble gesture.—"This is the first happiness I have known for seven years that has not come to me from him," she added, seizing her father's hand and kissing it, "and this is the first reproachful word I have heard."

"And your conscience?"

"My conscience! why he is my conscience!"

At that moment she started violently.

"Here he is," she said. "Even during a battle I can always distinguish his step among all the rest on the deck."

Suddenly a bright flush mounted to her cheeks, giving added splendor to her features and brilliancy to her eyes, and her complexion became a dead white,—there was a suggestion of happiness and love in the play of her muscles, in her blue veins, in the involuntary thrill that ran through her whole person. This display of deep feeling touched the general. A moment later, the privateer entered the stateroom, seated himself in an armchair, took his oldest son in his arms and began to play with

him. Silence prevailed for a moment, while the general, absorbed in a reverie comparable to the vague impressions of a dream, gazed about upon the dainty cabin, resembling a halcyon's nest, in which that family had been sailing the ocean for seven years, between sky and water, trusting in the faith of one man, and guided through the dangers of battle and tempest, as a family is guided through life by its head, amid social disasters. He gazed with admiration at his daughter, the image of a marine goddess, gentle in her beauty, rich in her happiness, and putting all the treasures that surrounded her to shame before the treasures of her heart, the brightness of her eyes and the indescribable poesy that exhaled from her person and floated in the air about her.

The extraordinary character of the situation bewildered him, the sublimity of passion and argument confounded vulgar ideas. The cold, narrow conventions of society became of little consequence before that picture. The old soldier was conscious of all this, and realized also that his daughter would never abandon a life so broad, so fruitful in contrasts, filled to overflowing with so great a love; and, if she had once tasted danger without being terrified thereby, she could never return again to the dull scenes of a narrow, paltry world.

"Do I embarrass you?" the privateer asked, breaking the silence at last, and looking at his wife.

"No," the general replied; "Hélène has told me everything. I see that she is lost to us."

"No," rejoined the privateer, eagerly. "A few years more and prescription will permit me to return to France. When a man who has run counter to your social laws has a pure conscience and has obeyed—"

He paused, disdaining to justify himself.

"How can you," said the general, interrupting him, "fail to feel some remorse for the new murders just committed before my eyes?"

"We had no provisions," said the privateer, calmly.

"But if you had set the men ashore—"

"They would have arranged to have our retreat cut off by some warship, and we should never have got back to Chili."

"But, before France could have notified the Spanish admiralty—" the general began.

"But France might not take kindly to the idea that a man who is still amenable to its assize court has taken possession of a brig chartered by Bordeaux merchants. However, haven't you sometimes fired several volleys more than were necessary on the field of battle?"

The general, awed by the privateer's glance, said nothing; and his daughter looked at him with an air that expressed as much triumph as melancholy.

"General," said the privateer in a deep voice, "I have made it an invariable rule that nothing shall be excepted from the general division of the booty. But there is no question that my share will

amount to more than your fortune. Permit me to make restitution to you in another form."

He took from the piano case a mass of bank-notes and handed a million francs to the marquis without counting the packages.

"You will understand," he continued, "that I cannot amuse myself by watching passers-by on the road to Bordeaux. Now, unless you are attracted by the risks of our wandering life, by the beautiful South American shores, by our tropical nights, by our battles, and by the pleasure of witnessing the triumph of a youthful nation's flag or of the name of Simon Bolivar—we must part. A boat manned by trustworthy men awaits you. Let us hope for a third meeting more completely happy than this."

"Victor, I would like to see my father a moment longer," said Hélène, with a pout.

"Ten minutes more or less may bring us face to face with a frigate. But no matter! we will have a little sport. Our people are tired of doing nothing."

"Oh! go at once, father," cried the seaman's wife. "And take to my sister and brothers, and to my—my mother," she added, "these tokens of my remembrance."

She seized a handful of precious stones, necklaces and jewels, wrapped them in a cashmere shawl and timidly offered them to her father.

"What shall I say to them from you?" he asked, apparently impressed by the hesitation his daughter had manifested before uttering the word *mother*.

"Oh! can you doubt my heart? I pray every day for their happiness."

"Hélène," said the old man, gazing earnestly at her, "shall I never see you again? Shall I never know the motive that led you to fly from my house?"

"That secret does not belong to me," she said in a grave tone. "Even if I had the right to tell you, perhaps I would not do it. I suffered incredible misery for ten years—"

She said no more, but handed her father the gifts intended for her family. The general, accustomed by the chances of war to somewhat broad ideas on the subject of booty, accepted the presents his daughter offered him, and took pleasure in the thought that, under the inspiration of a mind as pure and exalted as Hélène's, the Parisian captain might remain an honest man while making war on the Spaniards. His admiration for brave men won the day. Reflecting that it would be absurd in him to play the prude, he pressed the privateer's hand warmly, embraced his Hélène, his only daughter, with the effusiveness characteristic of soldiers, and dropped a tear upon that face, whose proud, virile expression had more than once rejoiced his heart. The sailor, deeply moved, put forward his children to receive his blessing. At last, they bade one another adieu for the last time with a long earnest gaze that was not devoid of deep feeling.

"May you always be happy!" cried the grandfather, rushing on deck.

A singular spectacle awaited the general on the ocean. The *Saint-Ferdinand* had been set on fire, and was blazing like a heap of straw. The sailors, who were employed in boring holes in her bottom to sink her, discovered that she had a large supply of rum on board—a liquor that abounded on the *Othello*, and they thought it a good joke to light a huge bowl of punch in mid-ocean. It was an amusement readily forgiven in men whom the apparent monotony of their life at sea made only too quick to seize every opportunity of adding zest thereto. As he went over the brig's side into the *Saint-Ferdinand's* gig, manned by six sturdy sailors, the general involuntarily divided his attention between the burning *Saint-Ferdinand* and his daughter, as she stood, leaning on the privateer's arm, at the stern of their vessel. With his mind so filled with memories, as he watched Hélène's white dress blowing about, like an additional sail, as he saw that tall, noble figure outlined against the sky, imposing enough to dominate everything, even the sea itself, he forgot, with a soldier's heedlessness, that he was rowing over the grave of the brave Gomez. Above him, a huge column of smoke floated like a dark cloud, and the sun's rays, piercing it here and there, cast poetic beams upon the sea. It was a second sky, a sombre dome, beneath which shone a sort of lustre, as it were, while above it stretched away the unchanging azure expanse of the firmament, seeming a thousand times more beautiful by reason of the momentary contrast. The strange hues of the

smoke, yellow, white, red and black by turns, or all blended, enveloped the vessel, which cracked and snapped and groaned. The flames hissed as they bit at the rigging, and ran through the vessel as a popular uprising flies through the streets of a city. The rum produced a bluish flame, which flickered as if the genius of the ocean were stirring up the maddened liquor, as a student's hand causes the joyous flames upon the surface of a bowl of punch to dance and soar aloft. But the sun, with its more powerful light, jealous of this insolent blaze, hardly allowed the eye to distinguish the colors of the conflagration amid its rays. It was like a net, or like a scarf floating about in the torrent of the sun's dazzling beams. The *Othello* made the most of the light wind that blew from this new direction, to put to sea, and swayed gracefully to this side and to that, like a kite balancing itself in the air. The beautiful craft stood away on a long tack to the southward; and now she would disappear from the general's sight behind the straight column of smoke, whose shadow was projected in fantastic shapes upon the water, and in another moment would appear again rising gracefully to the swell, and flying fast. Whenever Hélène could make out her father, she waved her handkerchief to bid him farewell once more. Soon the *Saint-Ferdinand* sank, producing a slight eddy that was soon effaced by the waves. Naught then remained of the whole scene but a cloud floating in the breeze. The *Othello* was far away; the boat was nearing the shore; the

cloud came between the frail craft and the brig. The last time the general saw his daughter was through a rift in that waving smoke. Prophetic vision! The white handkerchief and dress alone stood out against that dark background. Between the green water and the blue sky the brig was not even visible. Hélène was no more than an almost imperceptible point, a slender, graceful line, an angel in heaven, an idea, a memory.

Having re-established his fortunes, the marquis died, worn out with over-exertion. Some months after his death, in 1833, the marchioness was obliged to take Moïna to the waters of the Pyrenees. The capricious child insisted upon seeing the beauties of those mountains. She returned to the waters, and, soon after her return, the following horrible scene took place:

"*Mon Dieu,*" said Moïna, "we made a great mistake, mother, in not staying a few days more in the mountains. We were much better off there than here. Have you noticed the constant groaning of that cursed child and the everlasting chatter of that wretched woman, who must talk some *patois* or other, for I can't understand a single word she says? What sort of people have they given us for neighbors? Last night was one of the most frightful I ever passed in my life."

"I heard nothing," the marchioness replied; "but I will go and see the landlady, my dear child, and ask her to give us the next room; we shall be

alone there and shall have no more noise. How do you feel this morning? Are you tired?"

As she said these last words, the marchioness rose and went to Moïna's bedside.

"Let me see," said she, feeling for her daughter's hand.

"Oh! go away, mother," Moïna replied, "you're cold."

With that, the girl buried her head in her pillow, with a sulky movement, but so graceful withal that it was hard for a mother to take offence at it. At that moment, they heard in the adjoining room a prolonged wail, in a sweet, pitiful voice well calculated to rend a mother's heart.

"If you heard that all night, why didn't you call me? We would have—"

A deeper groan than any that had gone before, interrupted the marchioness.

"There's someone dying there!" she cried.

And she left the room in haste.

"Send Pauline to me!" cried Moïna; "I am going to dress."

The marchioness hurried downstairs and found the hostess in the courtyard, surrounded by several persons who seemed to be listening attentively to what she was saying.

"Madame, you have put in the room next to ours a person who seems to be suffering terribly."

"Oh! don't say a word!" cried the mistress of the establishment, "I have just sent for the mayor. Fancy, it's a woman, a poor unfortunate creature,

who arrived last night, on foot; she comes from Spain and has no passport or money. She had a little child on her back, that was dying. I couldn't refuse to take her in here. This morning I went myself to see her; for when she arrived here yesterday, she gave me a horrible shock. Poor little woman! she was in bed with her child and both were struggling with death. 'Madame,' she said, taking a gold ring from her finger, 'I have nothing left but this; take it to pay what I owe you; it will be enough, for my stay here will not be long. Poor little fellow! we shall die together!' said she, looking at her child. I took her ring and asked her who she was; but she wouldn't tell me her name. I have just sent for the doctor and the mayor."

"Pray let her have everything she can possibly need," cried the marchioness. "*Mon Dieu!* perhaps there is still time to save her! I will pay you for whatever you provide."

"Ah! madame, she seems to me to have a good deal of pride of her own, and I don't know whether she would consent."

"I will go and see her."

And the marchioness went up to the stranger's room, not thinking of the possible ill-effect of her appearance upon the woman, who was said to be moribund, for she was still in mourning. The marchioness turned pale as she looked at the dying woman. Despite the horrible suffering that had wrought sad havoc in Hélène's lovely face, she recognized her oldest daughter.

At the sight of a woman dressed in black, Hélène sat up in bed with a cry of terror, and fell slowly back when she recognized that woman as her mother.

"My child," said Madame d'Aiglemont, "what do you need? Pauline!—Moïna!"

"I need nothing now," Hélène replied in a feeble voice. "I hoped to see my father again, but your mourning tells me—"

She did not finish; she pressed her child to her heart as if to give it warmth, kissed its forehead, and cast a glance at her mother, in which reproach could still be read, although tempered by forgiveness. The marchioness chose not to see the reproach; she forgot that Hélène was a child conceived in tears and despair, a child of duty, a child who had been the cause of her greatest unhappiness; she walked forward gently to her oldest daughter, remembering only that Hélène had first taught her the joys of maternity. The mother's eyes filled with tears, and as she embraced her daughter, she cried:

"Hélène! my child!"

Hélène made no reply. She had just inhaled the last breath of her last child.

At that moment, Moïna, Pauline, her maid, the hostess and a physician entered the room. The marchioness was holding her daughter's icy hand in hers, and gazing at her in genuine despair. Exasperated by misfortune, the sailor's widow, who had just escaped from a shipwreck, saving only one child

of all her lovely family, said to her mother in a voice that was horrible to hear:

"All this is your work! If you had been to me what you were to—"

"Leave the room, Moïna—everybody leave the room!" cried Madame d'Aiglemont, drowning Hélène's voice with her own loud commands.—"In pity's name, my child," she added, "let us not renew at this moment the lamentable strife—"

"I will hold my peace," said Hélène, making a superhuman effort. "I am a mother and I know that Moïna ought not—Where is my child?"

Moïna returned to the room, impelled by curiosity.

"Sister," said the spoiled child, "the doctor—"

"It is all of no use," Hélène replied. "Oh! why did I not die at sixteen, when I tried to kill myself! Happiness cannot exist outside of the law. Moïna —you—"

She died, leaning over her child, whom she had pressed convulsively to her heart at the last.

"Your sister undoubtedly meant to say to you, Moïna," said Madame d'Aiglemont, when she returned to her room, where she burst into tears, "that a girl can never be happy in a merely romantic life, outside of accepted ideas, and above all things, away from her mother."

The Old Age of a Guilty Mother

*

During one of the first days of the month of June 1844, a lady of some fifty years of age, but who seemed older than her years, was walking in the sunlight, about midday, along a path in the garden of a large mansion on Rue Plumet, Paris. Having made several turns up and down the slightly winding path, on which she remained in order not to lose sight of the windows of an apartment to which her attention seemed to be exclusively devoted, she seated herself on one of the half-rustic armchairs made of young branches from which the bark is not removed. From that comfortable seat the lady was able to see, through one of the openings in the garden wall, the inner boulevards, in the centre of which the beautiful dome of the Invalides rears its golden cupola among the waving tops of countless elms—a superb landscape;—and also the less pretentious view presented by her own garden, terminated by the gray façade of one of the finest mansions in Faubourg Saint-Germain. There, all was silent, the neighboring gardens, the boulevards, the Invalides; for in that aristocratic quarter the day hardly begins before noon. Unless by reason of

some whim, unless some young woman wishes to ride, or some old diplomat has a protocol to revise, valets, masters, all at that hour are asleep or just opening their eyes.

The old lady who was abroad so early was the Marquise d'Aiglemont, mother of Madame de Saint-Héreen, to whom the noble mansion belonged. The marchioness had transferred it to her daughter, to whom she had given her whole fortune, reserving only an annuity for herself. Comtesse Moïna de Saint-Héreen was Madame d'Aiglemont's last child. The marchioness had sacrificed everything to induce the heir of one of the most illustrious houses in France to marry her. Nothing could be more natural; she had lost two sons in rapid succession; Gustave, Marquis d'Aiglemont, had died of cholera; Abel had been killed before Constantine. Gustave left a widow and children. But the decidedly lukewarm affection Madame d'Aiglemont had felt for her two sons became still weaker as applied to her grandchildren. She treated Madame d'Aiglemont the younger with courtesy; but she confined herself to the superficial sentiment which good taste and social conventions compel us to manifest for our kindred. The fortunes of her deceased children having been satisfactorily adjusted, she had put aside for Moïna her own property and her savings. Moïna, who had been ravishingly beautiful from infancy, had always been the object on Madame d'Aiglemont's part of one of those predilections which are inborn or involuntary in mothers of

families; fatal sympathies which seem inexplicable, or which observers are only too ready to explain. Moïna's charming face, the sound of that cherished darling's voice, her manners, her gait, her figure, her gestures, everything about her awakened in the marchioness's heart the deepest emotions that can vivify, disturb or charm a mother's heart. The moving principle of her present life, of her future and her past, was in that young woman's heart, into which she had cast all her treasures. Moïna had happily survived four children, all her seniors. Madame d'Aiglemont had, in truth, lost in a most unfortunate way, so said the gossips, a charming daughter, whose fate was almost unknown, and a little boy, the victim of a horrible catastrophe, at the age of five. Doubtless the marchioness saw a warning from above in the respect which fate seemed to entertain for the child of her heart, and accorded only a fleeting thought now and then to her children who had already fallen in obedience to the caprice of death, and who remained at the bottom of her heart, like the gravestones erected on a battlefield, which are almost hidden from sight by wild flowers. Society might well have held the marchioness to a strict accounting for this indifference and this favoritism; but society in Paris is hurried along by such a torrent of events and new fashions and ideas, that Madame d'Aiglemont's life was sure to be in some sort forgotten. No one thought of imputing to her as crimes a lack of warmth and a neglect which interested no one; while her ardent affection for

Moïna interested many people, and had all the sanctity of a prejudice. Besides, the marchioness went but little into society; and to most of those who knew her she seemed a kindly, gentle, pious, indulgent mother. Now, must one not have a very keen interest to induce one to go deeper than the appearances with which society is content? And then, what can we not forgive old people, when they efface themselves like ghosts, and no longer seek to be anything more than memories? In short, Madame d'Aiglemont was complacently cited as a model by children to their fathers, by sons-in-law to their mothers-in-law. She had given her property to Moïna during her life, content with the young countess's happiness, and living only in her and for her. If prudent old men and disappointed uncles disapproved her conduct, saying: "Madame d'Aiglemont may repent some day of having divested herself of her fortune in her daughter's favor; for, even if she knows Madame de Saint-Héreen's heart perfectly, can she be as sure of her son-in-law's probity?" there was a general outcry against the prophets; and eulogies rained upon Moïna from all sides.

"We must do Madame de Saint-Hèreen the justice to admit," remarked one young woman, "that her mother found no change in her surroundings. Madame d'Aiglemont has wonderfully pleasant quarters; she has a carriage at her service and can go wherever she pleases in society, just as before—"

"Except to the Italiens," murmured an old parasite, one of the people who imagine that they have a right to overwhelm their friends with epigrams on the pretext of displaying their independence. "The dowager cares for almost nothing but music, speaking of things that her spoiled child knows nothing about. She was such a fine musician in her day!—But, as the countess's box is always invaded by young butterflies, and as she would be rather an embarrassment to that young person, who is already talked about as a great flirt, the poor mother never goes to the Italiens."

"Madame de Saint-Héreen," said an old maid, "gives delightful evening parties for her mother and has a salon that all Paris frequents."

"A salon where no one pays any attention to the marchioness," replied the parasite.

"The fact is, that Madame d'Aiglemont is never alone," said a dandy, supporting the party of the young ladies.

"In the morning," rejoined the old sycophant, "in the morning dear Moïna sleeps. At four o'clock, dear Moïna drives in the Bois. In the evening, dear Moïna goes to the ball or the Bouffes. But to be sure, Madame d'Aiglemont has the privilege of seeing her dear daughter while she is dressing, or during dinner, when dear Moïna happens to dine with her dear mother. It isn't a week ago, monsieur," said the sycophant, taking by the arm a shy preceptor, a new comer in the house in which he then was, "since I saw the poor mother sitting sad

and alone at the corner of her hearth. 'What is it?' I asked her. The marchioness smiled as she looked up at me, but she had certainly been weeping. 'I was thinking,' she said, 'that it is very strange that I should be all alone after I have had five children; but it is all in our destiny! And then I am happy when I know that Moina is enjoying herself!' She could safely confide in me, because I used to know her husband. He was a poor creature, and he was very lucky to have her for a wife; he certainly owed to her his peerage, and his office at the court of Charles X."

But so many errors glide into the conversation of society, such profound harm is heedlessly done there, that the historian of manners is compelled to weigh carefully the assertions recklessly put forth by so many reckless gossips. Perhaps, indeed, one ought never to undertake to say whether the child or the mother is right or wrong. Between those two hearts there is but one possible judge. That judge is God! God, Who often wreaks His vengeance in the bosom of families, and constantly makes use of children against mothers, of fathers against sons, of peoples against kings, of princes against nations, of everything against everything; replacing one set of sentiments by another in the moral world, as young leaves expel the old leaves in the spring; acting by virtue of an unchangeable system, in pursuit of an object known to Him alone. We know that everyone goes to His bosom, or, better still, returns thither.

Such devout thoughts as these, so natural to the minds of old people, floated vaguely through Madame d'Aiglemont's mind; they shed an uncertain light there, being sometimes buried out of sight, sometimes completely unfolded, like flowers tossed about on the surface of the water during a tempest. She was sitting, worn out, enfeebled by long meditation, lost in one of those reveries in which one's whole life stands forth, unfolds itself before the eyes of those who feel the approach of death.

This woman, grown old before her time, would have presented an interesting picture to a poet who chanced to pass along the boulevard. Anyone who saw her sitting in the slender shadow of an acacia—the shadow of an acacia at noon—could have read one of the thousand things written upon that face, pale and cold even in the hot rays of the sun. Her expressive face spoke of something even more solemn than life is at its decline, of something more profound than a heart benumbed by experience. She was one of those types which, among a thousand faces from which you turn contemptuously aside because they are without character, make you pause for a moment and reflect; just as, amid the countless pictures in a gallery, you are profoundly impressed, it may be by the sublime face upon which Murillo depicts maternal grief, or by the face of Beatrice Cenci whereon Guido succeeded in depicting the most touching innocence as a background to the most horrible of crimes, or by the sombre face of Philip II., whereon Velasquez has expressed for all

ages the majestic terror that royalty should inspire. Certain human faces are despotic images, that speak to you and question you, answer your secret thoughts, and compose entire poems. Madame d'Aiglemont's rigid face was one of those terrible poems, one of the faces that are scattered broadcast by thousands through the *Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri.

During the brief season that a woman remains in bloom, the characteristics of her beauty second admirably the dissimulation to which her natural weakness and our social laws condemn her. Beneath the rich coloring of her fresh young face, beneath the fire of her eyes, beneath the lovely network of her delicate features, of such a labyrinth of lines, curved or straight, but unbroken and perfectly well marked, all her emotions may be kept secret; the blush reveals nothing then, for it simply deepens colors that are already brilliant; all the interior flames blend so perfectly with the light of her eyes, beaming with animation, that the fleeting gleam of a momentary pang appears simply as an added charm. Therefore nothing is so prudent as a youthful face, because nothing is more impassive. A young woman's face has the calmness, the smoothness, the freshness of the surface of a lake. A woman's real face does not begin to show until she is thirty. Until that age the painter finds in their faces only the same shades of pink and white, smiles and expressions which repeat the same thought, the thought of youth and love, an unvarying thought

that has no depth; but, in old age, everything about a woman speaks, the passions are graven upon her features; she has been sweetheart, wife and mother; the most violent expressions of joy and grief have ended by distorting, torturing her lineaments, by leaving their marks there in countless wrinkles, all of which have a language of their own; and a woman's face thereupon becomes sublimely terrible, beautifully sad, or magnificently calm; if we may venture to pursue this strange metaphor, the lake when it has run dry lays bare the traces of all the torrents that produced it; an old woman's face no longer belongs to the frivolous world, which views therein with dismay the destruction of all the ideas of elegance to which it is accustomed, nor to commonplace artists who can discover nothing therein, but to the true poets, to those who can appreciate a beautiful object independently of all the conventions that lie at the root of so many prejudices concerning art and beauty.

Although Madame d'Aiglemont wore a fashionable capote, it was easy to see that her hair, once black, had been whitened by cruel emotions; but the way in which she separated it into two broad bands betrayed her excellent taste, revealed the attractive manners of a woman of the world, and outlined perfectly her withered, wrinkled brow, in whose shape could still be seen some traces of its former splendor. The lines of her face, the regularity of her features conveyed some idea—a feeble idea, it is true—of the beauty of which she might

well have been proud; but those same tokens indicated even more clearly the sorrow that had been enough to furrow that face, to wither the temples, to hollow the cheeks, to draw dark circles around the eyes and deprive them of their lashes, which lend charm to the glance. She was always silent; her gait and her movements had that solemn, meditative moderation that compels respect. Her modesty, transformed into timidity, seemed to be the result of the habit, which she had adopted some years before, of effacing herself in her daughter's presence; she spoke but rarely, and her speech was soft, like that of all persons who are compelled to reflect, to concentrate their feelings, to live in themselves. Her attitude and her reserve inspired an indefinable sentiment, which was neither fear nor compassion, but in which all the ideas aroused by those diverse emotions were mysteriously blended. In fine, the nature of her wrinkles, the way in which her face was seamed, the pallor of her pitiful expression, all bore eloquent witness to the tears that are consumed by the heart and never fall to earth. Those wretched creatures who are accustomed to gaze up to Heaven to appeal to it from the woes of their earthly lives, would readily have recognized in this mother's eyes, the wearing habit of praying every instant of the day, and the faint vestiges of the secret bruises that finally destroy the flowers of the heart, even to the sentiment of maternity. Painters have colors for these portraits, but ideas and words are powerless to describe them

faithfully; there are in the tones of the complexion, in the expression of the face, inexplicable phenomena, which the mind grasps through the eyes; but the narrative of the events to which such terrible upheavals of the countenance are due, is the only resource remaining to the poet to make them understood. Her face betokened a cold, calm storm within, a secret combat between the heroism of maternal grief and the infirmity of our emotions, which are finite like ourselves, and among which nothing immortal is ever found. This constantly repressed suffering had at last caused her to become morbid to some extent. Doubtless some over-violent emotions had wrought an organic change in her maternal heart, and some fatal disease, an aneurism perhaps, threatened Julie, unknown to her, with gradual decay. Genuine suffering is apparently so tranquil in the deep bed it makes for itself, where it seems to sleep, but continues to corrode the heart, like that redoubtable acid that eats through crystal! At that moment, two tears rolled down the marchioness's cheeks, and she rose as if some more poignant reflection than all that had gone before, had wounded her to the quick. She had undoubtedly formed an accurate forecast of Moïna's future. And as she meditated upon the sorrow that was in store for her daughter, all the disasters of her own life fell with crushing weight upon her heart.

The mother's situation will be better understood when we have explained her daughter's.

The Comte de Saint-Héreen had left Paris some

six months before upon a political mission. During his absence Moïna, who, to all the petty vanities of the flirt added the capricious fancies of the spoiled child, had amused herself,—through mere lightheadedness or from the inborn coquetry of woman, or it may be to try her power, too,—by playing with the passion of a clever but heartless man, who claimed to be intoxicated with love, with that love with which all the little social and absurd ambitions of the dandy are commingled. Madame d'Aiglemont, who had by long experience acquired a knowledge of life, and had learned to judge men and to fear the world, had watched the progress of the intrigue, and foresaw her daughter's ruin when she found that she had fallen into the hands of a man to whom nothing was sacred. Was it not a terrible thing for her to recognize a true *roué* in the man whom Moïna seemed to listen to with delight? Therefore, her darling child was on the brink of an abyss. She had a horrible certainty that it was so, but did not dare check her, for she was afraid of the countess. She knew beforehand that Moïna would listen to none of her wise words of warning; she had no power over that heart, as hard as iron toward her, but soft to others. Her affection would have led her to interest herself in the woes and pains of a passion justified by the seducer's noble qualities, but her daughter was acting upon an impulse of coquetry; and the marchioness despised Comte Alfred de Vandenesse, knowing that he was the man to look upon his contest with Moïna as a game of chess. Although

Alfred de Vandenesse filled the wretched mother with horror, she was obliged to bury the real reasons for her aversion in the deepest recesses of her heart. She was intimately connected with the Marquis de Vandenesse, Alfred's father, and their friendship, which was entirely respectable in the eyes of the world, authorized the young man to frequent Madame Saint-Héreen's salon on familiar terms, professing for her, as he did, a passion conceived in childhood. Moreover, Madame d'Aiglemont would have found her efforts of no avail if she had determined to cast between her daughter and Alfred de Vandenesse a terrible avowal that should separate them; she was certain that she would not succeed, despite the power of that avowal, which would have dishonored her in her daughter's eyes. Alfred was too corrupt, Moïna too shrewd to believe in such a revelation, and the young countess would have evaded it by treating it as a maternal stratagem. Madame d'Aiglemont had built her prison with her own hands and walled herself in, to die there watching Moïna's lovely life destroy itself,—that life which had become her glory, her happiness and her consolation, a life a thousand times dearer to her than her own. Horrible, ghastly, indescribable suffering! a bottomless abyss!

She was impatiently awaiting her daughter's appearance, and yet she dreaded it, as the wretch condemned to death would be glad to have done with life, and yet turns cold when he thinks of the executioner. The marchioness had resolved to make

one last attempt; but she was less afraid perhaps of failing in her attempt than of receiving another of those wounds that pierced her heart so deeply that they had exhausted all her courage. Her mother-love had reached this point: to love her daughter, to fear her, to apprehend a dagger-thrust and go to meet it. The maternal sentiment is so expansive in loving hearts, that before becoming indifferent to her child a mother should die, or find solace in some great power—religion or love. Since she arose, the marchioness's too faithful memory had recalled several of the incidents, trifling in appearance, which are of the utmost importance in one's moral life. In truth, a gesture sometimes develops a whole drama, the accent of a word destroys a whole life, an indifferent glance wrecks the happiest passion. The Marquise d'Aiglemont had unhappily seen too many of those gestures, heard too many of those words, received too many of those heart-piercing glances, for her memories to afford her any hope. Everything combined to prove that Alfred had ruined her in her daughter's heart, where she, her mother, now figured less as a pleasure than as a duty. A thousand things, even trifles, bore witness to the countess's detestable conduct toward her—ingratitude, which the marchioness regarded perhaps as a punishment. She sought excuses for her daughter in the designs of Providence in order that she might still adore the hand that smote her. During that morning she remembered everything and everything pierced her heart anew so keenly that her cup, filled

to the brim with grief, was ready to overflow if the slightest additional pang were inflicted on it. A single cold glance might kill the marchioness. It is difficult to describe these little domestic incidents, but a few of them will suffice, perhaps, for all. For instance, the marchioness, who had become a little deaf, had never been able to induce Moïna to raise her voice for her; and one day when, in obedience to the harmless impulse natural to those so afflicted, she asked her daughter to repeat a sentence of which she had not caught a word, the countess complied, but with such ill grace that Madame d'Aiglemont never felt at liberty to renew the modest request. Since then, when Moïna told a story or had anything to say, the marchioness was careful to draw her chair near to her; but the countess often seemed disgusted with her mother's infirmity and thoughtlessly reproached her with it. This example, which was only one of a thousand, could not fail to wound a mother's heart. All these things would have escaped a casual observer perhaps, for there are shades of cruelty imperceptible to other eyes than a woman's. Thus, Madame d'Aiglemont having informed her daughter one day that the Princesse de Cadignan had been to see her, Moïna simply exclaimed: "What! she came to see you!"—The flippant air with which these words were spoken and the countess's accent displayed an astonishment and a haughty scorn that would have caused hearts still young and tender to consider as philanthropic in comparison, that custom by virtue of which savage

tribes kill their old men when they cannot cling to the branch of a tree if it is violently shaken. Madame d'Aiglemont rose with a smile on her face and went off to weep in secret. Well-bred people, especially women, betray their feelings only by touches that are hardly perceptible, but none the less make the vibrations of their hearts evident to those who can remember situations in their own lives analogous to this heart-broken mother's. Overwhelmed by her memories, Madame d'Aiglemont recalled more than one of those cruel, stinging episodes, in which she had never recognized more clearly than at that moment, the atrocious contempt hidden beneath a smiling face. But her tears quickly dried when she heard the blinds raised in the room where her daughter slept. She hurried toward the windows along the path that skirted the wall near which she had been sitting. As she went along, she noticed the special care with which the gardener had raked the path, which had been ill kept for some little time. When Madame d'Aiglemont arrived beneath her daughter's windows, the blinds were sharply closed again.

"Moïna?" she called.

No reply.

"Madame la Comtesse is in the small salon," said Moïna's maid, when the marchioness returned to the house and asked if her daughter had risen.

Her heart was too full and her mind too busily occupied to pause at that moment to consider such trifling circumstances; she went at once to the small

salon, where she found the countess in a *peignoir*, with a cap tossed carelessly upon her disheveled hair, her feet in slippers and the key of her bedroom in her girdle; her face indicated that her reflections were of a stormy nature, and her color was very high. She was sitting on a couch and seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Why am I disturbed?" she said in a harsh voice. "Ah! it is you, mother," she continued absent-mindedly, after interrupting herself.

"Yes, my child, it is your mother."

The tone in which Madame d'Aiglemont uttered these words, denoted an effusion from the heart and a profound emotion which it would be difficult to describe adequately without using the word sanctity. She was, in truth, so thoroughly invested with the sacred character of a mother, that her daughter was struck by it and turned toward her with an impulsive movement which expressed respect, uneasiness and remorse at once. The marchioness closed the door of the salon, which no one could enter without giving warning as they came through the adjoining rooms. Thus they were secure from interruption.

"My daughter," said the marchioness, "it is my duty to enlighten you as to one of the most momentous crises that can occur in a woman's life,—a crisis that has come upon you now, unknown to yourself perhaps, and of which I speak to you less as a mother than as a friend. When you married, you became mistress of your actions and you are

responsible for them to no one but your husband; but I have used my maternal authority so lightly —and I have done wrong, perhaps—that I think I have a right to ask you to listen to me, this once at least, in your present serious situation, in which you certainly need advice. Remember, Moïna, that I married you to a man of eminent talents, of whom you may well be proud, that—"

"Mother," cried Moïna with a rebellious air, interrupting her without ceremony, "I know what you are going to say. You are going to preach to me on the subject of Alfred."

"You would not divine my purpose so readily, Moïna," replied the marchioness gravely, trying to restrain her tears, "if you did not feel—"

"What?" said she, with an almost arrogant expression. "Why, really, mother—"

"Moïna," cried Madame d'Aiglemont, making a superhuman effort, "you must listen carefully to what I am compelled to say to you."

"I am listening," said the countess, folding her arms, with an impertinent affectation of submission. "Permit me, mother," she said with indescribable self-possession, "to ring for Pauline to send her away."

She rang.

"My dear child, Pauline cannot hear."

"Mamma," rejoined the countess, with a serious air which must have seemed extraordinary to her mother, "I must—"

She checked herself as the maid entered.

"Pauline, go *yourself* to Baudran, and find out why I have not yet received my hat."

She resumed her seat and looked attentively at her mother. The marchioness, whose heart was bursting though her eyes were dry, and who was overcome by such painful emotion as only mothers can understand, tried to make Moïna appreciate the risk she was running. But, whether the countess was wounded by her mother's suspicions concerning the Marquis de Vandenesse's son, or was seized with one of those incomprehensible fits of madness, which can only be explained by the inexperience of youth, she took advantage of a pause made by her mother to say to her with a forced laugh:

"Mamma, I thought you were jealous only of the father."

At those words, Madame d'Aiglemont closed her eyes, hung her head and sighed the faintest of all sighs. She glanced upward, as if in obedience to the invincible impulse that leads us to call upon God in the great crises of life; then she looked at her daughter with eyes filled with awe-inspiring majesty and expressing also the bitterest sorrow.

"My daughter," said she in an almost unrecognizable voice, "you have been more pitiless to your mother than was the man she outraged, more pitiless than God will be perhaps!"

Madame d'Aiglemont rose; but, when she reached the door, she turned and seeing only surprise in her daughter's eyes, left the room and succeeded in reaching the garden, where her strength abandoned

her. Feeling a sharp pain at her heart, she fell upon a bench. As her eyes wandered over the sand, they spied there the recent footprints of a man, whose boots had left unmistakable marks. Beyond question then her daughter was ruined, and she fancied that she could understand the motive of the commission given to Pauline. This cruel thought was accompanied by a revelation more hateful than all the rest. She imagined that the Marquis de Vandenesse's son had driven from Moïna's heart the respect due from a daughter to her mother. Her suffering increased, she lost consciousness gradually and lay as if she were asleep. The young countess thought that her mother had been betrayed into giving her rather too sharp a reprimand, and said to herself that a caress or a few little attentions in the evening would readily effect a reconciliation. Hearing a woman's shriek in the garden, she walked indifferently to the window just as Pauline, who had not yet gone to do her errand, called for help and took the marchioness in her arms.

"Don't alarm my daughter!" were the last words the mother uttered.

Moïna saw them bring her mother in, pale, unconscious, breathing with difficulty, but waving her arms about as if she were trying to do or say something. Horror-stricken by the sight, Moïna followed her mother and assisted silently in undressing her and putting her upon her bed. Her sin overwhelmed her. At that supreme moment, she really knew her mother, and she could do nothing to repair the

wrong she had done. She wished to be alone with her; and when there was no one else in the room, when she felt the cold hand that had been always caressing to her, she burst into tears. Aroused by her weeping, the marchioness was still able to look at her dear Moïna; and when she heard the sobs that seemed to seek to rend that delicate and disturbed bosom, she gazed at her daughter with a smile. That smile proved to the young parricide that a mother's heart is an abyss at whose bottom forgiveness may always be found.

As soon as the marchioness's condition was discovered, mounted servants were despatched for the physician, the surgeon, and her grandchildren. The young marchioness and her children arrived at the same time as the medical gentlemen, and formed an imposing, silent, anxious assemblage, with whom the servants mingled. The young marchioness, hearing no sound, knocked softly at the bedroom door. At that signal, Moïna, disturbed in the midst of her grief, abruptly threw the door wide open, looked out upon the family gathering with haggard eyes, and exhibited a distress that spoke louder than any words could have done. At the sight of that living remorse, everyone was dumb. They could easily see the marchioness's rigid feet, distorted by convulsions, upon the bed of death.

Moïna clung to the door, looked at her relatives, and said in a hollow voice:

"I have lost my mother!"

Paris, 1828–1844.

THE DESERTED MISTRESS

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MME. DE BEAUSÉANT AND M. DE NUEIL

Madame de Beauséant turned her face toward the door and saw her former lover. Monsieur de Nueil thereupon stepped forward a few steps.

"If you come nearer, monsieur," cried the marchioness, turning pale, "I will throw myself out of the window!"

THE DESERTED MISTRESS

*

In 1822, at the beginning of spring, the physicians of Paris sent into Basse Normandie a young man who was just recovering from an inflammatory trouble caused by excessive study, or, it may be, by too high living. His convalescence demanded complete repose, nutritious food, cool air and entire absence of violent sensations. The rich fields of the Bessin and the colorless life of the provinces seemed therefore well adapted to accelerate his recovery. He went to Bayeux, a pretty town some two leagues from the sea, to the house of a female cousin, who welcomed him with the cordiality characteristic of persons accustomed to a retired life; to whom the arrival of a relative or friend is a source of real delight.

All small towns are much alike with the exception of some special customs. After several evenings passed with his cousin, Madame de Sainte-Sevère, or with the persons who composed her circle of intimates, this young Parisian, whose name was Monsieur le Baron Gaston de Nueil, soon came to know everybody whom that exclusive circle considered as making up the whole town. In them, Gaston de

Nueil recognized the perennial types that careful observers find in the numerous capitals of the ancient States, which formed the France of long ago.

In the first place, there was the family whose nobility, unknown at a distance of fifty leagues, is considered in the department incontestable and of the most venerable antiquity. This species of *royal family* on a small scale rubs elbows, through its alliances, although no one suspects it, with the Navarreins and Grandlieus, touches the Cadignans and clings like a leech to the Blamont-Chauvrys. The chief of the illustrious race is always a determined sportsman. Being entirely devoid of breeding, he crushes everybody about him with his nominal superiority; he tolerates the sub-prefect, just as he submits to the impost; he acknowledges none of the new powers created by the nineteenth century, and calls your attention to the fact, as a political monstrosity, that the prime minister is not a man of noble birth. His wife adopts a peremptory tone, talks very loud, has had her adorers, but partakes of the Sacrament regularly at Easter; she brings up her daughters badly and fancies that they will always be rich enough in their name. The husband and wife have no idea of the luxury of the present day; they continue to dress their servants in stage liveries, cling to the old styles in plate, furniture and carriages, as in manners and language. Moreover, this pomp of the olden time is more consistent with provincial economy. In short, they are the gentlemen of the old days, less the fines and

escheats, less the hunting packs and laced coats; all filled to overflowing with lofty ideas of their own honor, all devoted to princes whom they see only at a distance. This historic house, unknown to fame, retains the peculiarity of old-fashioned, high-warp tapestry. There is sure to be an uncle or a brother vegetating in the family, a lieutenant-general, *cordon rouge,* hanger-on of the court, who went to Hanover with Maréchal de Richelieu, and whom you will find lying around like a stray leaf from an old pamphlet of the time of Louis XV.

Opposed to this fossilized family is another, possessed of greater wealth but of less ancient nobility. The husband and wife go to Paris for two months every winter, and bring back therefrom its fleeting tone and ephemeral passions. Madame is fashionable, but a little stiff and always behindhand with the styles. However, she sneers at the ignorance affected by her neighbors; her silver-plate is modern; she has grooms, negroes and a *valet de chambre.* Her elder son sports a tilbury and has no business; he has a *majorat;* the younger is auditor to the Council of State. The father, who is thoroughly posted in the intrigues of the ministry, has a store of anecdotes concerning Louis XVIII. and Madame du Cayla; he invests in the *five per cents,* avoids talking about cider, but is sometimes attacked by a mania for rectifying estimates of departmental fortunes; he is a member of the *Conseil Général,* has his clothes made in Paris, and wears the Cross of the Legion of Honor. In short, this

gentleman has rightly understood the Restoration and coins money in the Chamber; but his royalism is less pure than that of the family with which he maintains a constant rivalry. He takes in the *Gazette* and the *Débats*. The other family reads nothing but the *Quotidienne*.

Monseigneur the bishop, formerly vicar-general, wavers between these two powers which render him the honors due to religion but sometimes make him feel the force of the moral that good La Fontaine placed at the end of *The Ass Laden with Relics*. The worthy man is of plebeian extraction.

Then come the secondary stars, the gentlemen who enjoy incomes of from ten to twelve thousand francs, and who have been naval commanders or captains of cavalry, or nothing at all. As they ride about over the roads, they occupy a middle position between the curé carrying the Sacraments to a dying man and the tax-collector on his round. Almost all of them have been pages or in the guards, and are ending their days peacefully in exploiting their estates, more concerned about a felling of wood or the yield of their cider-mills than about the monarchy. However, they talk about the Charter and the Liberals between their rubbers of whist, or over a game of backgammon, after calculating dowries and arranging marriages with due regard to the genealogies they know by heart. Their wives play at pride and assume the airs of ladies of the court, in their wicker cabriolets; they consider themselves in full dress when they are

decked out in a shawl and bonnet; they purchase two hats a year, but only after mature deliberation, and have them sent from Paris second-hand; they are generally virtuous and garrulous.

Around these leading elements of the aristocratic class are grouped two or three old maids of quality who have solved the problem of immobilizing the human creature. They seem to be sealed up in the houses in which you see them; their faces and their toilets are a part of the realty of the town, of the province; they are its tradition, its memory, its mind. There is something rigid and monumental about them all; they know how to smile or shake their heads at the proper time, and now and then make remarks that are considered clever.

A few wealthy bourgeois have wormed themselves into this little Faubourg Saint-Germain, thanks to their aristocratic opinions or their fortunes. But despite their forty years, everyone says of them there: "Little *so-and-so* thinks!" and they make deputies of them. Generally, they are patronized by the old maids, but people talk about it.

Lastly, two or three ecclesiastics are received into this select circle, on account of their stoles, or because they have some pretensions to wit, and these noble persons, wearying of their own company, introduce the bourgeois element into their salons, as a baker puts yeast in his dough.

The sum total of intelligence amassed in all these heads consists of a certain quantity of old-fashioned ideas with which are mingled some few new notions

brewed in common every evening. Like the water in a little creek, the phrases that represent these ideas have their daily ebb and flow, their perpetual eddies, always the same in every instance; he who hears the empty sounds to-day, will hear the same to-morrow, a year hence, forever. Their unchangeable decisions upon earthly matters form a traditional mass of knowledge, to which no one can possibly add one drop of wisdom. The life of these slaves of routine gravitates in a sphere of habits as immutable as their religious, political, moral and literary opinions.

If a stranger is admitted to this holy of holies, everyone will say to him, not without a shade of irony: "You won't find your brilliant Parisian society here!" and everyone will speak slightingly of his neighbors' mode of life, attempting to convey the impression that he is an exception to the rule prevailing in that social circle, and that he has tried unsuccessfully to remodel it. But if the stranger, unluckily for himself, confirms by some remark the opinion that these people mutually entertain of one another, he is at once set down as a shameless creature, a faithless and lawless Parisian, and corrupt, *as all Parisians are, generally speaking.*

When Gaston de Nueil made his appearance in this little world, where etiquette was rigidly observed, where all the details of life were in perfect harmony, where everything was open to the day, where aristocratic and territorial stocks were quoted just as the funds are quoted on the last page of the

newspapers, he had been weighed beforehand in the infallible scales of Bayeux opinion. His cousin, Madame de Sainte-Sevère, had already disclosed the exact figure of his fortune and his prospects, exhibited his genealogical tree, boasted of his knowledge, his courtesy and his modesty. He received the welcome to which he was strictly entitled, was accepted without cavil as a genuine nobleman, because he was only twenty-three years old; but certain young ladies and some mothers made soft eyes at him. He possessed an income of eighteen thousand francs from an estate in the valley of Auge, and his father was certain, sooner or later, to leave him the château of Manerville with all its dependencies. As for his education, his political future, his personal worth, his talents, they were simply not considered at all. His estates were in excellent condition and the rents assured; some fine plantations had been laid out there; the repairs and taxes were all borne by the tenants; the apple trees were thirty-eight years old; and his father was in the market to purchase two hundred acres of woodland adjoining his park, which he proposed to surround with walls; no ministerial prospects, no human celebrity could carry the day against such advantages. Whether in a spirit of mischief or to forward some scheme of her own, Madame de Sainte-Sevère had not mentioned Gaston's elder brother, and Gaston said not a word about him. But the brother in question was consumptive and seemed in a fair way to be buried, mourned, forgotten. Gaston de Nueil

began by making sport of these various personages; he sketched their faces, so to speak, in his album, picturing their angular, hooked, wrinkled faces with delicious accuracy and hitting off their amusingly original costumes and tricks of speech and gesture to the very life; he took much pleasure in the *Normanisms* of their idiom, and their antiquated ideas and characters. But after he had had a momentary experience of that existence, which much resembled the life of a squirrel whose whole time is passed in making his cage revolve, he felt the absence of variety in a life in which everything is prescribed beforehand like that of a monk in a cloister, and reached a state of feeling which was neither ennui nor disgust, but produced almost all the effects of both. After the slight inconvenience caused by the transition, the individual finds himself transplanted into soil that is not favorable to his growth, where he is likely to wither and fade and to lead a stunted life. Indeed, if nothing happens to remove him from that circle, he insensibly adopts its customs and accommodates himself to its emptiness, which takes possession of him and emasculates him. Gaston's lungs were already becoming accustomed to this atmosphere. Prepared to discover a sort of vegetating happiness in these aimless, thoughtless days, he began to lose all memory of the movement of sap in the veins, of the constant fructification of the intellect which he had so ardently followed in the Parisian world, and was on the point of becoming petrified among the petrifactions, there to

remain forever, like the companions of Ulysses, content with his thick envelope. One evening, Gaston de Nueil found himself sitting between an old lady and one of the vicars-general of the diocese, in a salon with gray wainscoting, floored with large, square, white tiles, with a few family portraits on the walls and four card-tables around which sixteen people were chattering volubly over their games of whist. As he sat there, thinking of nothing, but digesting one of those exquisite dinners which one always looks forward to throughout the day in the provinces, he surprised himself in the act of justifying the customs of the country. He understood why those people continued to use old cards and deal them upon worn out cloths, and how it came about that they had ceased to dress to suit themselves or other people. He imagined some philosophical explanation or other of the uniform current of this life in a circle, of their tranquil adherence to these logical costumes, of their ignorance of true refinement. In a word, he almost appreciated the uselessness of luxury. The city of Paris, with its passions, its tempests and its dissipation, had ceased to exist in his mind, save as a memory of his childhood. He admired in good faith the red hands and the modest, timid manner of a young woman, whose face, when he first saw it, had seemed utterly inane to him, her manners devoid of charm, her general appearance repulsive, and her bearing supremely ridiculous. It was all over with him. Having gone originally to Paris from the provinces, he was on the

point of relapsing from the exciting existence of Paris into the dull routine of the provinces, when a single sentence fell upon his ear and caused him a sudden thrill of emotion like that he would have felt upon hearing some new and striking *motif* amid the music of a tiresome opera.

"Did you not go to call upon Madame de Beauséant yesterday," said an old lady to the head of the princely family of the province.

"I went this morning," was the reply. "I found her very much cast down and so ill that I could not prevail upon her to dine with us to-morrow."

"With Madame de Champignelles?" cried the dowager, manifesting something very like surprise.

"With my wife," said the gentleman, calmly. "Is not Madame de Beauséant of the family of Bourgogne? Through the female line, to be sure, but the name atones for everything. My wife is very fond of Madame la Vicomtesse, and the poor woman has been alone so long, that—"

As he spoke, the Marquis de Champignelles bestowed a calm, cold glance upon the persons who were listening to him with their eyes fixed upon his face; but it was almost impossible to guess whether he was making a concession to ill-fortune or to Madame de Beauséant's noble blood, whether he was flattered at the thought of entertaining her, or was determined as a matter of pride, to force the gentlemen of the country and their wives to meet her.

All the ladies apparently consulted one another by an exchange of glances, all of exactly the same

character; and as the most profound silence thereafter reigned throughout the salon, their attitude was as an indication of their disapproval.

"Is this Madame de Beauséant, by any chance, the one whose affair with Monsieur d'Ajuda-Pinto caused so much talk?" Gaston inquired of his nearest neighbor.

"The same," was the reply. "She came to Courcelles to live after the Marquis d'Ajuda's marriage; no one receives her here. Indeed she knows too much not to have realized her false position; so she has not attempted to see anyone. Monsieur de Champignelles and some few men have called upon her, but she has received no one but Monsieur de Champignelles, perhaps because of their relationship; they are connected through the Beauséants. The elder Marquis de Beauséant married a Champignelles of the elder branch. Although the Vicomtesse de Beauséant is said to descend from the house of Bourgogne, you will understand that we could not receive a woman who is separated from her husband. There are some old-fashioned ideas to which we are foolish enough to adhere. The viscountess is all the more blameworthy for her escapades because Monsieur de Beauséant is a most excellent man and connected with the court; he would have been very willing to listen to reason. But his wife is a mad creature—"

Monsieur de Nueil, although he heard his interlocutor's voice, was no longer listening. He was absorbed by a multitude of fancies. Is there another

word to express the allurements of an adventure at the moment when it first smiles on the imagination, at the moment when the heart conceives vague hopes, foresees unspeakable delights, fears and events, although there is as yet nothing with which to feed or shape the capricious vision? The mind flies hither and thither, forms impossible schemes and puts forth in germ the delight of passion. But perhaps that germ contains the whole passion, just as a seed contains a lovely flower with its odor and rich coloring. Monsieur de Nueil did not know that Madame de Beauséant had taken refuge in Normandie after a scandal of the sort that most women envy and condemn, especially when the fascinations of youth and beauty almost justify the false step that caused it. Every sort of celebrity, no matter upon what it may be based, carries with it an extraordinary prestige. It seems as if the glory of a crime effaces its shame in the case of women, as it used to do in the case of families. Just as a certain family prides itself upon its severed heads, so a young and pretty woman becomes more attractive by virtue of the fatal renown of a fortunate intrigue or a shocking act of treachery. The more she is to be pitied, the more sympathy she excites. We are pitiless only in respect to vulgar sentiments, vulgar adventures, vulgar matters of every sort. By attracting attention, we make ourselves appear great. In truth, must we not raise ourselves above other people, in order to be seen? Now, the common herd involuntarily respects every one who

has increased his own stature, without scrutinizing the means too closely. At that moment, Gaston de Nueil felt drawn toward Madame de Beauséant by the secret influence of these arguments, or perhaps by curiosity, by the need of introducing some motive into his present life, in a word, by a multitude of reasons impossible to describe, which the word *fatality* often serves to express. The Viscomtesse de Beauséant had suddenly arisen before him, accompanied by a swarm of attractive images; she was a new world; with her there was unquestionably something to fear, to hope for, to do battle with and to conquer. She was certain to form a striking contrast to the persons now before Gaston's eyes in that shabby salon; in short, she was a woman, and he had not as yet met a woman in that frigid circle, where sentiment was replaced by scheming, where courtesy was simply a duty, and there was something so offensive in the simplest ideas that they could not be accepted, or even uttered. Madame de Beauséant awakened in his mind the memory of his youthful dreams and his liveliest passions, momentarily sleeping. He was absent-minded during the rest of the evening. He was pondering the means of gaining admission to Madame de Beauséant's house, and in truth there seemed to be none. She was said to be eminently clever. But if intellectual females ever allow themselves to be seduced by shrewd or original expedients, they are exacting, they are quick at divining everything; with them therefore, there are as many

chances of self-destruction as of success in the difficult enterprise of pleasing them. Moreover, the viscountess knew how to combine the dignity that her name enjoined upon her with the pride due to her situation. The utter solitude of her life seemed to be the least of the barriers between her and society. It was therefore almost impossible for a stranger, however excellent his family, to gain admission to her house. However, the next morning Monsieur de Nueil directed his steps toward the country house of Courcelles, and walked several times around the enclosure in which it lay. Deceived by the illusions in which it is so natural for a young man of his years to believe, he looked through the gaps or over the walls, stood in mute contemplation before the closed blinds or examined those that were open. He hoped for some romantic adventure, he arranged its results in his mind, without perceiving their impossibility, in such a way as to introduce himself beneath the stranger's roof. He walked there several mornings to very little purpose; but every morning, that woman, living outside the world, the victim of true love, buried in solitude, assumed greater proportions in his mind and effected a lodgment in his heart. And so Gaston's heart beat high with joy and hope, if perchance, as he skirted the walls of Courcelles, he heard a gardener's heavy tread.

He thought seriously of writing to Madame de Beauséant; but what can you say to a woman you never saw and who does not know you? Moreover,

Gaston was distrustful of himself; and, like all young men who are still filled with illusions, he feared the terrible disdain of silence more than death itself, and shuddered when he thought of all the chances his first amorous effusion would have of being thrown into the fire. In his mind a thousand opposing ideas struggled for the mastery. But at last, by dint of evolving chimeras, composing romances and cudgeling his brains, he conceived one of those happy stratagems which occur sooner or later among the great number of those of which we dream, and which reveal to the most guileless woman the extent of the passion a man has formed for her. Often social whims create as many real obstacles between a woman and her lover, as the oriental poets introduce into their delicious tales, and their most fantastic whims are rarely exaggerated. Thus, in real life as in fairyland, a woman ought always to belong to the man who succeeds in making his way to her side and delivering her from the sad plight in which she is languishing. The poorest of calenders, falling in love with a caliph's daughter, was surely separated from her by no greater distance than that which divided Gaston and Madame de Beauséant. The viscountess was absolutely ignorant of the lines of circumvallation drawn around her by Monsieur de Nueil, whose love waxed greater in proportion to the size of the obstacles to be surmounted, and who attributed to his improvised mistress, the charms that every distant object possesses.

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One day, trusting to his inspiration, he based the wildest hopes on the love that he knew must gush from his eyes. Believing the spoken word to be more eloquent than the most impassioned letter, and speculating also upon the natural curiosity of woman, he went to Monsieur de Champignelles, proposing to make use of him in carrying out his enterprise. He said to that gentleman that he had an important and delicate mission to fulfil to Madame de Beauséant; but, as he did not know whether she would read letters written in a strange handwriting or would bestow her confidence upon a stranger, he begged him to ask the viscountess, when he next called upon her, if she would deign to receive him. While requesting the marquis to keep his secret in case of refusal, he very cleverly prevailed on him to promise to use with Madame de Beauséant any arguments that were likely to procure his admission to her house. Was he not a man of honor, straightforward and incapable of taking part in anything that was not in the best of taste or was unseemly in any respect? The haughty nobleman, whose petty vanity he flattered, was completely taken in by this diplomacy of passion which lends a young man the cool assurance and eminent power of dissimulation of an old ambassador. He tried his best to fathom Gaston's secrets; but as that gentleman would have been much embarrassed to reveal

them to him, he met Monsieur de Champignelles' adroit questions with Norman phrases and was complimented by him, like a true French chevalier, upon his discretion.

The marquis hurried off at once to Courcelles with the eagerness which gentlemen of a certain age display in rendering a service to a pretty woman. Madame de Beauséant's situation was then such that a message of that sort was well calculated to puzzle her. And so, although her memory afforded her no light as to any possible motive that could bring Monsieur de Nueil to her, she saw no impropriety in receiving him, but only after she had prudently made inquiries as to his social position. She began by refusing, however; then she discussed the point of propriety with Monsieur de Champignelles, questioning him so as to ascertain whether he knew the motive of the proposed visit; then she revoked her refusal. The discussion and the marquis's involuntary discretion had aroused her curiosity.

Monsieur de Champignelles, not wishing to appear ridiculous, declared, with the manner of a man who was himself well informed but discreet, that the viscountess must certainly know the motive of the visit, although she was seeking in perfect good faith, but unsuccessfully, to find out what it was. Madame de Beauséant devised all sorts of imaginary relations between Gaston and people he did not know, lost herself in absurd suppositions, and wondered if she had ever seen Monsieur de Nueil. The

most sincere or most adroit love-letter would surely have produced less effect than this species of insoluble enigma over which Madame de Beauséant puzzled more than once.

When Gaston learned that he could see the viscountess, he was at the same moment wild with joy at obtaining so promptly a favor so ardently desired, and singularly embarrassed as to the sequel of his ruse.

"Bah!" he said to himself as he was dressing, "to see *her;* to see her, that is all I want!"

He hoped too that, on crossing the threshold at Courcelles, he should hit upon some expedient to cut the Gordian knot that he had himself tied. Gaston was one of those men who, believing in the omnipotence of necessity, always go ahead; and at the last moment, when they are face to face with danger, take inspiration from it and find strength to overcome it. He devoted particular attention to his toilet. He imagined, as young people do, that his success might depend upon the adjustment of a buckle, not knowing that in youth everything is charming and attractive. Besides, women of the rare worth of Madame de Beauséant yield to no seductions save the charms of wit and superiority of character. A lofty character flatters their vanity, gives promise of a grand passion and seems certain to satisfy the demands of their hearts. Wit amuses them and answers the subtleties of their nature, and they believe that they are understood. Now what do all women crave, if not to be amused, understood

or adored? But one must have pondered long over the vicissitudes of life to be able to divine the artistic coquetry that consists in negligence in the matter of costume and mental reserve at a first interview. When we become sufficiently crafty to be skilful politicians, we are too old to profit by our experience. While Gaston distrusted his mental powers sufficiently to borrow attractions from his clothing, Madame de Beauséant herself instinctively took especial pains with her toilet, and said to herself as she arranged her hair:

"I certainly don't wish to look like a fright."

Monsieur de Nueil had in his mind, in his person, and in his manners that frankly original turn which gives a sort of savor to the most ordinary ideas and gestures, permits a man to say anything, and makes everything he says or does pass current. He was well-informed and shrewd, with a face as bright and mobile as his impressionable soul. There were passion and tenderness in his sparkling eyes, and his essentially kind heart did not belie them. The decision he formed as he entered Courcelles was in harmony, therefore, with his frank character and his ardent imagination. Despite the proverbial intrepidity of love, he could not keep down the violent beating of his heart, when, after crossing a broad courtyard laid out like an English garden, he was ushered into a hall where a footman took his name and then disappeared, returning at once to introduce him.

"Monsieur le Baron de Nueil.'

Gaston entered slowly, but with sufficient ease of manner,—a much more difficult matter in a salon where there is only one woman than in one where there are twenty. At the corner of the fireplace, where, despite the season, a huge fire was burning, and over which two candelabra were lighted, shedding a soft light through the room, he espied a young woman seated in one of the modern easy-chairs with a very high back, and a seat so low that it allowed her to place her head in various attitudes instinct with grace and charm—to rest it upon one side, to throw it back, to raise it languidly as if it were a heavy burden; and then she could cross her feet, and show them or draw them back beneath the long folds of a black dress. The viscountess attempted to place the book she was reading upon a small round table; but as she turned her head toward Monsieur de Nueil at the same moment, the book missed its mark and fell upon the floor between the table and her chair. Exhibiting no surprise at the incident, she drew herself up, and bowed in response to the young man's salutation; but her bow was almost imperceptible and she hardly rose from her seat, in which her body was still buried. She bent forward and hastily stirred the fire; then she stooped, picked up a glove which she distractedly drew on her left hand, seeking the other with a glance that she quickly repressed; for with her right hand—a white, almost transparent hand, without rings, slender, with taper fingers and pink nails that formed a perfect oval,—she pointed to a chair as if to

bid Gaston be seated. When her stranger-guest had taken his seat, she turned her face toward him with a coquettish, questioning movement, whose perfect delicacy it would be impossible to describe; it was one of those gracious gestures instinct with kindly, but closely-guarded meaning, which are the result of early education and constant familiarity with those things that good taste enjoins. These various movements succeeded one another rapidly, in an instant, smoothly and without abruptness, and fascinated Gaston by the combination of reserve and ease of manner with which a pretty woman improves upon the aristocratic airs of the first society. Madame de Beauséant presented so striking a contrast to the automata among whom he had been living for two months of exile in the wilds of Normandie, that she seemed the personification of the poetry of his dreams; he could recall none of the women whose charms he had formerly admired who could be compared to her. Facing that woman, in a salon furnished like the ordinary salon of Faubourg Saint-Germain, filled with the costly trifles that lie around upon tables, and with books and flowers in profusion, it seemed as if he were in Paris once more. He was treading upon a genuine Parisian carpet, he saw once more the distinguished type, the slender figure of the Parisian woman, her exquisite grace and her indifference to the studied effects that so greatly detract from the charms of women in the provinces.

Madame la Vicomtesse de Beauséant was of light

complexion, fair as any blonde, and had brown eyes. She possessed a noble brow, the brow of a fallen angel who exults in her fall and does not seek forgiveness. Her luxuriant hair, arranged in high braids above two bands which described broad curves around her brow, added another element of majesty to her head. The imagination saw in the spiral tresses of that golden headdress, the ducal crown of Bourgogne, and in the great lady's sparkling eyes, all the courage of her family; the courage of a woman strong only to repel scorn or insolence, but overflowing with tenderness for the softer sentiments. The outline of her small head, admirably poised upon a long white neck; her thin lips and the various features of her intelligent, mobile face maintained an expression of rare prudence, a tinge of affected irony which resembled slyness and impertinence. It was difficult not to forgive her those two foibles of womankind, when one considered her misfortunes, the passion that had well-nigh cost her her life and was attested, as well by the wrinkles that furrowed her brow at the slightest excitement, as by the pitiful eloquence of her lovely eyes which were often raised to Heaven. Was it not an imposing spectacle—made even more imposing by the imagination—to see in that immense, silent salon a woman cut off from the whole world, a woman who for three years had been living in a little valley, far from the town, alone with the memories of a brilliant, happy, passionate youth, once filled with fêtes, with

constant homage, but now doomed to the horrors of annihilation? Her smile denoted a lofty conception of her worth. Neither wife nor mother, cast out by society, bereft of the only heart that could cause hers to beat joyfully without shame, deriving from no emotion the assistance of which her tottering soul stood in sore need, she had no choice but to draw her strength from herself, to live her own life, and to have no other hope than that of the deserted mistress: to await death, to hasten its slow progress despite the beautiful days that still remained to her. To feel that she was made to be happy and to die without receiving or bestowing happiness!—a woman! What agony! Monsieur de Nueil made these reflections with the rapidity of lightning, and became exceedingly ashamed of his own paltry individuality in presence of the most exalted poesy with which a woman can envelop herself. Fascinated by the threefold majesty of beauty, misfortune and nobility, he stood almost agape, musing, gazing in admiration at the viscountess, but unable to find anything to say to her.

Madame de Beauséant, who was in all probability not displeased by his evident surprise, put out her hand with a mild but imperious gesture; then, recalling a smile to her pallid lips, as if in obedience to the natural impulse of her sex, she said:

"Monsieur de Champignelles informed me, monsieur, that you had very kindly undertaken to deliver a message to me. Is it from—?"

As he listened to those terrible words, Gaston

realized more fully than before the absurdity of his situation, the wretched taste, the disloyalty of his conduct toward a noble and unhappy woman. He blushed. His expression, under the influence of a thousand thoughts, became confused; but suddenly, with the strength that youthful hearts are able to draw from the very consciousness of their faults, he took heart of grace; interrupting Madame de Beauséant, with a gesture expressive of the most humble submission, he answered in a voice trembling with emotion:

"Madame, I do not deserve the good fortune of being allowed to see you; I have deceived you shamefully. The feeling that I acted upon, however powerful it may be, is utterly inadequate to excuse the miserable subterfuge to which I resorted to reach you. But, madame, if you would be kind enough to allow me to say to you—"

The viscountess flashed upon him a glance overflowing with haughty contempt, raised her hand to the bell cord and rang; the footman appeared.

"Light monsieur to the door, Jacques," said she, with a dignified glance at the young man.

She rose proudly, bowed to Gaston, and stooped to pick up the book that had fallen. Her movements were as cold and abrupt as those with which she welcomed him had been courteous and graceful. Monsieur de Nueil had risen, but remained standing by his chair. Again Madame de Beauséant glanced at him as if to say: "Well, aren't you going?"

Her glance was so marked with stinging mockery

that Gaston became as pale as though he were on the point of fainting. Tears gathered in his eyes; but he forced them back, dried them in the fires of shame and despair, and gazed at Madame de Beauséant with a sort of pride, expressive at once of resignation and of a certain consciousness of his own worth; the viscountess had the right to punish him, but would she do it? Then he left the room. As he passed through the reception-room, his perspicacity and his intelligence, sharpened by passion, caused him to realize all the danger of his situation.

"If I leave this house," he said to himself, "I may never be admitted again; the viscountess will always look upon me as an idiot. It is impossible for a woman—and she is a woman!—not to divine the love she inspires; she may perhaps feel a vague, involuntary regret at having dismissed me so curtly, but she cannot, she ought not to revoke her decree: I must find a way to understand her."

At that reflection, Gaston stopped on the doorsteps, uttered an exclamation, turned quickly, and said:

"I have forgotten something!"

And he walked back toward the salon, followed by the footman, who had the utmost respect for a baron and the sacred rights of property, and was completely deceived by the innocent tone in which the words were said. Gaston entered softly, unannounced. When the viscountess, thinking perhaps that the intruder was her footman, raised her head, she found Monsieur de Nueil standing before her.

"Jacques lighted me out," he said, smiling.

The half-melancholy expression of his smile divested the remark of all pleasantry and the tone in which it was uttered went to the heart.

Madame de Beauséant was disarmed.

"Very well, be seated," she said.

Gaston eagerly took possession of the chair. His eyes, alight with happiness, gleamed so brightly that the viscountess could not endure the youth's glance, but looked down upon her book, and tasted the pleasure, always new, of being to a man the moving principle of his happiness—an imperishable sensation in a woman. Moreover, Madame de Beauséant's character had been divined. A woman is so grateful when she falls in with a man who understands the logical caprices of her heart, the apparently contradictory workings of her mind, the fleeting modesty of her sensations, now timid and now bold—a marvelous mingling of coquetry and artlessness!

"Madame!" said Gaston, softly, "you know my fault, but you do not know my crimes. If you knew with what joy I have—"

"Ah! beware," she said, raising one of her fingers threateningly until it touched the end of her nose; and with the other hand, she made a gesture as if to take hold of the bell cord.

This pretty gesture, this graceful threat evidently aroused some sad memory of her happy life, of the time when she could afford to be all charm and fascination, when happiness justified the caprices of

her mind just as it lent an additional charm to her slightest movements. She concentrated all the wrinkles on her forehead between her eyebrows; her face, in the soft light of the candles, assumed a sombre expression; she looked at Monsieur de Nueil with a serious air, in which there was no trace of coldness, and said to him, in the tone of a woman deeply impressed by the meaning of her words:

"All this is most ridiculous! Time has been, monsieur, when I had the right to be foolishly light-hearted, when I could have received you and laughed with you without fear; but to-day my life is greatly changed, I am no longer mistress of my actions and I am compelled to reflect before acting. To what sentiment do I owe your visit? Is it curiosity? In that case, I pay very dearly for a brief moment of happiness. Could you already love *passionately* a woman whom you have infallibly heard slandered, and whom you never saw? Your sentiments must therefore be based upon a lack of esteem, upon a transgression which has become famous by mere chance."

She threw her book angrily upon the table.

"Ah yes!" she continued, with a withering glance at Gaston, "because I have been weak once, the world proposes that I shall be weak always? That is degrading, ghastly. Do you come to my house to pity me? You are very young to sympathize with the heartache. Understand, monsieur, I prefer contempt to pity; I will not submit to compassion from anyone."

There was a moment's silence.

"You see, monsieur," she said, looking up at him with a mild and melancholy expression, "whatever the feeling may have been that led you to force yourself heedlessly upon me in my retirement, you wound me. You are too young to be altogether without kindness of heart, so you will realize the impropriety of your conduct; I forgive you and speak to you now without bitterness. You won't come here again, will you? I request when I might command. If you call upon me again it will not be in your power or in mine to prevent the whole town from believing that you are to be my lover and you will add a very great sorrow to my present sorrows. You have no such desire, I am sure."

As she ceased, she looked into his face with a true dignity that covered him with confusion.

"I have done wrong, madame," he replied earnestly; "but the ardor of youth, thoughtlessness and an eager longing for happiness are, at my age, good and bad qualities. Now," he continued, "I understand that I should not have tried to see you, and yet my desire was very natural."

He tried to describe, with more sentiment than wit, the suffering to which his enforced exile had condemned him. He depicted the sad plight of a young man whose fires burned without fuel, giving her to understand that he was worthy to be loved dearly and yet had never known the bliss of a passion inspired by a young and beautiful woman of taste and refinement. He explained his violation

of propriety without attempting to justify it. He flattered Madame de Beauséant by proving to her that in his eyes she realized the type of mistress incessantly but vainly invoked by the majority of young men. Then, as he spoke of his morning excursions about Courcelles and of the lawless ideas that had taken possession of him at sight of the house to which he had at last gained admission, he aroused the indefinable indulgence a woman finds in her heart for the vagaries she inspires. His impassioned voice had a strange sound in that cold solitude, to which he brought the warm inspiration of youth and the intellectual charm that reveals a careful training. Madame de Beauséant had been too long a stranger to the emotions aroused by sincere sentiments cunningly expressed, not to enjoy them keenly. She could not refrain from watching Monsieur de Nueil's expressive face, and admiring in him the refreshing confidence of the heart that has not yet been rent by cruel experience of the life of the world, nor consumed by the incessant scheming of ambition or vanity. Gaston was youth in its flower, and exhibited himself as a man of high character who knew nothing as yet of his lofty destiny. Thus both, unknown to each other, were indulging in reflections most dangerous to their repose, and trying to hide them from each other. Monsieur de Nueil recognized in the viscountess one of those rare women who are always victims of their own perfections and their inextinguishable tenderness, whose winning beauty is their least charm when they

have once opened the doors of their hearts, wherein the sentiments are infinite, where everything is good, where the instinct of the beautiful unites with the most varied expressions of love to purify the passions and make them almost holy; marvelous secret of womankind, an exquisite gift so rarely accorded by nature. The viscountess, too, as she listened to the tone of sincerity in which Gaston spoke of the misadventures of her youth, appreciated the torture inflicted by timidity upon tall children of twenty-five, when study has guaranteed them against the corrupt contact of men of the world, whose garrulous experience taints the noble qualities of youth. She found in him the man that all women dream of,—a man who has as yet no trace of the egotism of family and fortune, nor of the personal sentiment that ends by killing, in their first burst of enthusiasm, devotion, honor, self-abnegation and self-esteem,—flowers of the heart, soon withered, which at first enrich life with delicate though powerful emotions, and revive probity of the heart in man. Once launched upon the vast ocean of sentiment, they traveled very far in theory, sounded the depth of each other's hearts, and investigated the sincerity of their expressions. This examination, involuntary on Gaston's part, was premeditated on Madame de Beauséant's. Resorting to her natural or acquired finesse, she expressed, without lowering herself in her own estimation, opinions contrary to those she really held, in order to ascertain Monsieur de Nueil's. She was so bright and amiable, so

thoroughly herself with a young man who did not arouse her suspicion,—as she never expected to see him again,—that Gaston exclaimed naïvely at one extremely charming remark she made:

"Ah! madame, how could a man have deserted you?"

The viscountess made no reply. Gaston blushed. He thought he had offended her. But she was taken by surprise by the first profound, genuine pleasure she had felt since the day disaster came upon her. The most adroit *roué* could not have made with all his art the progress Monsieur de Nueil owed to that cry from his heart. This judgment extorted from a young man's candid soul made her innocent in her own eyes, condemned society, accused the man who had left her, and justified her in coming to languish in that desert. Worldly absolution, touching sympathy, social esteem, all so fervently longed-for, so cruelly refused—in a word, her most secret desires were gratified by that exclamation, embellished as it was by the sweetest flatteries of the heart and by the admiration that is always greedily devoured by women. So she was appreciated and understood at last, and Monsieur de Nueil in the most natural way gave her the opportunity to make herself the greater for her fall. She glanced at the clock.

"Oh! madame," cried Gaston, "do not punish me for my thoughtlessness. If you give me but one evening, pray do not shorten it."

She smiled at the compliment.

"As we are not to meet again," she replied, "what matters a moment more or less? If I should please you, it would be a great misfortune."

"A misfortune that has already happened," said he, sadly.

"Do not say so," she rejoined, gravely. "Under any other circumstances I should receive you with great pleasure. I am going to speak frankly to you, and you will understand why I will not, why I must not see you again. I believe you to be too intelligent not to perceive that if I should be simply so much as suspected of a second misstep, I should become, in everybody's eyes, a vulgar, despicable creature, I should resemble other women. A pure and spotless life will give dignity to my character. I am too proud not to endeavor to live in the midst of society as a being apart, a victim of the laws by my marriage, a victim of men by my love. If I did not remain faithful to my position, I should deserve all the blame that has been poured out upon me and should forfeit my own esteem. I have not had the lofty social virtue of belonging to a man I did not love. I broke the bonds of marriage, in the teeth of the law; it was a mistake, a crime, call it what you please; but to me the married state was equivalent to death. I chose to live. If I had been a mother, perhaps I should have found strength to endure the torture of a marriage arranged from motives of convenience. At eighteen, we poor girls hardly know what we are made to do. I violated the laws of society and society has punished me; we both acted

rightly. I was in search of happiness. Isn't it a law of our nature to be happy? I was young, I was beautiful—I believed that I had met a being as loving as he seemed passionate. I was loved dearly for a moment!"

She paused.

"I thought," she continued, "that no man would ever desert a woman in the plight in which I was. I was deserted, so I must have ceased to please. Yes, I failed doubtless to obey some law of nature. I must have been too loving, too devoted, too exacting, I cannot say what. Misfortune enlightened me. After I had been for a long while the accuser, I resigned myself to be the only criminal. Thus I absolved at my own expense the man of whom I thought I had a right to complain. I was not clever enough to keep him: fate has punished me severely for my lack of cleverness. I simply know how to love: how can one think of one's self when one loves? And so I was the slave when I should have been the tyrant. Those who know me may condemn me, but they shall esteem me. My sufferings have taught me not to expose myself again to desertion. I cannot understand how I continue to live, after undergoing the agony of the first week that followed the catastrophe, the most frightful that can occur in a woman's life. One must have lived alone for three years to have acquired the strength to speak of that agony as I am speaking at this moment. Agony ordinarily ends in death, but, monsieur, this was an agony without

the grave for a conclusion. Oh! I did suffer horribly!"

The viscountess raised her lovely eyes to the cornice, to which in all likelihood she confided all that a stranger might not hear.

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A cornice is the gentlest, the most submissive, the most obliging confidant that a woman can find on occasions when she dares not look at her interlocutor. The cornice in a boudoir is an institution. Is it not a confessional, minus the priest? At that moment, Madame de Beauséant was eloquent and lovely; we might say coquettish, if that word were not a little too strong. By doing herself justice, by placing the highest barriers between herself and love, she gave a spur to all the sensations of the man before her; and the higher she raised the goal the more clearly his eyes could see it. At last she looked down at Gaston, having first forced her eyes to lay aside the too alluring expression that the remembrance of her suffering had imparted to them.

"Admit that it is my duty to remain unmoved and alone," she said, calmly.

Monsieur de Nueil was conscious of a violent impulse to fall at her feet; but, sublime in his good sense as in his madness, he feared to appear ridiculous to her; he repressed his excitement and his thoughts, therefore; he felt at the same moment the fear that he might not succeed in expressing them clearly, and the dread of some crushing refusal, or of a mocking retort, the apprehension of which freezes the most ardent hearts. The reaction of the sentiments that he forced back, just as they were

rushing forth from his heart, caused him the profound pain familiar to timid and ambitious persons, who are often forced to devour their desires. However, he could not refrain from breaking the silence to say in a trembling voice:

"Permit me, madame, to yield to one of the most powerful emotions of my whole life, by confessing to you how you cause me to feel. You expand my heart! I feel within me a longing to pass my life in helping you to forget your sorrows, in loving you for all those who have hated or wounded you. But it is a very sudden effusion of the heart, for which there is no justification to-day, and which I should—"

"Enough, monsieur," said Madame de Beauséant. "We have both gone too far. I desired to divest of all appearance of harshness, the refusal that I cannot avoid, by explaining to you the melancholy reasons for it, and not to win homage from you. Coquetry is becoming to none but happy women. Believe me, we had better remain strangers. Later you will learn that it is not well to form ties at all when they must necessarily be broken some day."

She sighed lightly and her brow was furrowed for a moment, to resume at once its natural purity of surface.

"What torture for a woman," she continued, "to be unable to follow the man she loves through all the phases of his life. And must not her profound disappointment awaken a ghastly echo in the man's heart, if he loves her dearly? Is it not a twofold calamity?"

There was a moment's silence, after which she said, smiling, and rising so that her guest was compelled to rise:

"You did not expect, when you were coming to Courcelles, to listen to a sermon here, did you?"

Gaston felt at that moment farther away from this extraordinary woman than when he first accosted her. Attributing the charm of the delightful hour he had passed to the coquetry of a hostess anxious to display her wit, he bowed coldly to the viscountess, and left the house in despair. As he walked away, the baron tried to fathom the character of this creature, who seemed to him as supple and as hard as a spring; but he had seen her adopt so many different shades of conduct that it was impossible for him to pass an accurate judgment upon her. The tones of her voice still resounded in his ears, and memory conferred so great a charm upon her gestures, the toss of her head, the play of her eyes, that he became more in love than ever, as a result of his reflections. The viscountess's beauty still shone for him in the darkness, the impressions he had received from it awoke to renewed life, each leading up to another, to fascinate him anew by revealing to him graces of person and of mind unperceived at first. He fell into one of those rambling fits of meditation, during which the most lucid thoughts fall out and crush one another and plunge the mind into a brief paroxysm of madness. One must needs be young to discover and to understand the secrets of this species of dithyramb, in which

the heart, assailed at the same time by the most reasonable and the wildest ideas, yields to the last one that strikes it, to a thought of hope or of despair, at the will of an unknown power. At the age of twenty-three, a man is almost always dominated by a feeling of modesty; he is as timid and confused as a young girl, he is afraid of giving inadequate expression to his love, he sees only difficulties and takes fright at them, he trembles with the fear that he may cease to please, he would be bold if he did not love so much; the more strongly he feels the value of happiness, the less inclined he is to believe that his mistress will readily bestow it upon him; or it may be that he abandons himself too entirely to his own pleasure and fears that he confers none; when, unhappily, his idol is an imposing creature, he adores her in secret and from afar; if his state of mind is not divined, his love expires. Often this precocious passion, dead in a youthful heart, remains there glowing with illusions. What man has not several of these virgin memories which, at a later period, awake, always more attractive than before, and bring the image of perfect happiness? memories like children lost in the flower of youth, whose parents have known naught of them but smiles. Monsieur de Nueil therefore took his departure from Courcelles, in a condition of mind heavy with extreme resolutions. Madame de Beauséant had already become an essential condition of his existence; he preferred death to life without her. As he was still young enough to feel the cruel

fascination that a perfect woman exerts over passionate and untried hearts, he was fated to pass one of those tempestuous nights during which young people go from bliss to suicide and from suicide back to bliss, consume a whole happy life and fall asleep at last exhausted. Horrible nights, when the greatest misfortune that can happen is to awake and find one's self a philosopher. Too genuinely in love to be able to sleep, Monsieur de Nueil got up, wrote a number of letters, no one of which satisfied him, and burned them all.

The next day, he made the circuit of the little estate of Courcelles, but not until nightfall, for he was afraid of being seen by the viscountess. The sentiment in obedience to which he was then acting, belongs to so mysterious a quality of the heart, that one must needs be still young, or be placed in a similar situation, in order to understand its mute felicity and its oddity; things which would call forth a contemptuous shrug from people who are fortunate enough always to see the *positive* in life. After much painful hesitation, Gaston wrote Madame de Beauséant the following letter, which may pass as a model of the phraseology peculiar to lovers, and may be compared to the drawings made in secret by children for their parents' birthdays; presents detestable in the eyes of everybody except those who receive them:

"MADAME:

"You possess such unbounded empire over my heart and soul and body that my fate rests entirely in your hands

to-day. Do not throw my letter into the fire. Be kind-hearted enough to read it. Perhaps you will forgive the first sentence when you see that it is no mere commonplace, selfish declaration, but the statement of an indubitable fact. Perhaps you will be touched by the modesty of my prayers, by the resignation inspired by my consciousness of my inferiority, by the influence of your decision upon my life. Young as I am, madame, I simply know how to love; I am entirely ignorant both as to what may please a woman and as to what fascinates her; but I feel at my heart an intoxicating adoration for her. I am irresistibly drawn to you by the immense joy you cause me to feel, and I think of you with all the egotism that draws us to the place where the life-giving heat is to be found. I do not deem myself worthy of you. No, it seems impossible for me, young, ignorant and timid as I am, to afford you the thousandth part of the bliss I breathed while listening to you and looking at you. You are, in my eyes, the only woman in the world. Unable to contemplate life without you, I have resolved to leave France and to go and trifle with my life until I lose it in some impossible enterprise in the Indies, in Africa, or God knows where. Must I not combat a love that knows no bounds with something infinite? But if you will leave me one ray of hope, not of belonging to you, but of obtaining your friendship, I will remain. Permit me—even very rarely if you insist upon it—to pass with you a few such hours as those I purloined. That insecure good fortune, the unspeakable enjoyment of which may be forbidden me at the first too ardent word, will suffice to enable me to endure the boiling of my blood. Have I presumed too far upon your generosity, in begging you to permit an intercourse from which I alone derive any benefit? You will easily find a way to show these people here, to whom you sacrifice so much, that I am nothing to you. You are so clever and so proud! What have you to fear? I would like to be able now to open my heart to you, in order to convince you that my humble request conceals no mental reservation. I would not have told you that my love knew no bounds and

at the same time have begged you simply to bestow your friendship upon me, if I had entertained the hope of bringing you to share the profound sentiment buried in my heart. No, I will be to you whatever you wish me to be, provided only that I am something to you. If you have the heart to refuse me, and do so, I will not murmur; I will go away. If, hereafter, any other woman than yourself has any part in my life, you will be justified; but if I die faithful to my love, you will feel some regret, perhaps! The hope of causing you a regret will sweeten my anguish, and will be the only vengeance of my unappreciated heart."

One must have passed through all the serviceable disasters to which youth is exposed, one must have bestridden all the chimeras with the two white wings that offer their feminine croup to burning imaginations, to understand the torture to which Gaston de Nueil was a victim, when he fancied that his first *ultimatum* was in Madame de Beauséant's hands. He imagined the viscountess unmoved, laughing and joking about love like those who have ceased to believe in it. He would have liked to recall his letter, it seemed ridiculous to him, there came to his mind a thousand and one ideas infinitely more appropriate, and which would have been far more touching than his stiff sentences, his absurd, labored, sophistical, pretentious periods, happily very badly punctuated and written in a shocking hand. He tried not to think, not to feel; but he did think and feel and suffer. If he had been thirty years old, he would have got drunk; but the still innocent youth knew nothing of the resources of opium or of the expedients of the most highly

developed civilization. He had not at his side one of those kind Parisian friends, who are so ready to say to you: POETE, NON DOLET! passing you a bottle of champagne, or dragging you off to a debauch to lighten the hours of uncertainty. Excellent friends, who are always ruined when you are rich, always at the waters when you look for them, have always lost their last louis at play when you ask them for one, but always have a wretched nag to sell you; in other respects, the best fellows in the world, and always ready to embark with you to descend one of those swift inclines on which time and strength and life are squandered!

At last, Monsieur de Nueil received from the hands of Jacques, a letter sealed with the arms of Bourgogne upon perfumed wax, written upon a tiny sheet of fine paper, and redolent of lovely woman.

He at once locked himself in his room to read and reread *his* letter.

"You punish me very severely, monsieur, both for my good nature in sparing you the mortification of a downright refusal, and for the charm that wit always possesses for me. I had confidence in the nobility of youth, and you have undeceived me. However, I spoke to you—if not with open heart, which would have been perfectly ridiculous—at all events frankly, and I described my position to you, in order that your youthful heart might understand my coldness. The more you interested me, the greater the pain you caused me. I am naturally good-tempered and affectionate; but circumstances make me hard. Another woman would have burned your letter without reading it, but I have read it and I answer it. My arguments will prove to you that, although I am not

insensible to the expression of a sentiment of which I am the cause, even involuntarily, I am far from sharing it, and my conduct will demonstrate yet more clearly the sincerity of my heart. Moreover, I have determined, for your good, to use the species of authority which you give me over your life, and I desire to exert it, once for all, to remove the veil that covers your eyes.

"I shall soon be thirty, monsieur, and you are barely twenty-two. You have no idea yourself what ideas you will have when you reach my age. The oaths you take so readily to-day, may then seem very heavy to you. To-day I am quite willing to believe you would give me your whole life without regret, you would gladly die even for a fleeting pleasure; but at thirty, experience would deprive you of the strength to make sacrifices every day for me, and I should be profoundly humiliated to accept them. Some day everything, even nature itself, would bid you leave me; as I have told you, I prefer death to desertion. Unhappiness, you see, has taught me to look out for the future. I argue calmly, for I have no passion. You force me to tell you that I do not love you, that I cannot, will not, should not love you. I have passed the time of life when women yield to unreflecting impulses of the heart, and I could not be to you the mistress you seek. My consolation, monsieur, comes from God, not from man. Again, I can read hearts too clearly by the melancholy light of betrayed love, to accept the friendship which you seek and offer. You are deceived by your heart, and you rely much more on my weakness than on your own strength. That is all a matter of instinct. I forgive your childish stratagem, you do not yet appreciate what you did. I command you, in the name of this ephemeral love, in the name of your life, in the name of my peace of mind, to remain in your country, and not to miss the opportunity of a noble and honorable life there, for an illusion which will necessarily be destroyed. Hereafter, when you have, in the fulfilment of your real destiny, developed all the sentiments that await the full-grown man, you will appreciate my answer, which you will perhaps

at this moment characterize as heartless. You will then take pleasure in renewing your acquaintance with an old woman whose friendship will certainly be sweet and precious to you; it will not have been subjected to the vicissitudes of passion or to the disenchantments of life; noble, pious thoughts will keep it pure and holy. Adieu, monsieur; obey me, with the thought that your success will bring some pleasure to me in my solitude, and think of me only as you think of the absent."

Having read this letter, Gaston de Nueil wrote these words:

"Madame, confess that if I should cease to love you and should accept the prospect you put before me of being a commonplace man, I should deserve my fate. No, I will not obey you, and I swear to be faithful to you until death dissolves my oath. Oh! take my life, unless indeed you fear to give yourself cause for remorse."

When Monsieur de Nueil's servant returned from Courcelles, his master said to him:

"To whom did you give my note?"

"To Madame la Vicomtesse herself; she was in her carriage, just driving away."

"To come into town?"

"I think not, monsieur. Madame la Vicomtesse's berlin was drawn by post-horses."

"Ah! she has gone away," said the baron.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the valet.

Gaston at once made his arrangements to follow Madame de Beauséant, and she led him as far as Geneva, unconscious that he was at her heels. Among the thousand reflections that occupied his mind during that journey, the one that recurred

most frequently was this: "Why did she go?" That question was the text of a multitude of conjectures, from which he naturally selected the most flattering, namely: "If the viscountess proposes to accept my love, of course, like the clever woman she is, she prefers Switzerland, where no one knows us, to France, where she would encounter harsh critics."

Some passionate men do not like women who are clever enough to choose their own ground, but such men are too exacting. Besides, there is nothing to prove that Gaston's supposition was well-founded.

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The viscountess took a small house on the lake. When she was installed there, Gaston made his appearance one lovely afternoon just at nightfall. Jacques, an essentially aristocratic valet, was not surprised to see Monsieur de Nueil, and announced him with the air of one who was in the habit of understanding everything. When she heard the name and saw the young man, Madame de Beauséant dropped the book she held; her surprise gave Gaston time to reach her side and to say to her in a voice which sounded very sweet to her:

"How delighted I was to take the same horses that brought you here!"

To find one's secret wishes so quickly obeyed! Where is the woman who would not have yielded to such happiness? An Italian woman, one of those divine creatures whose hearts are the very antipodes of those of the Parisian women, and who would be considered profoundly immoral on this side of the Alps, said, apropos of French novels: "I don't see why those poor lovers pass so much time arranging what ought to be a matter of a morning." Why could not the present writer, acting upon the excellent Italian's theory, refrain from wearying his readers and wearing out his subject? There might be, to be sure, a few scenes of charming coquetry to describe, delays which Madame de Beauséant chose sweetly to impose upon Gaston's

happiness, in order to fall with grace, like the virgins of antiquity; perhaps also to enjoy the chaste ecstasy of a first love and to cause it to attain its highest development of strength and power. Monsieur de Nueil was still at the age when a man is the dupe of his caprices, of the sportiveness that so delights a woman and that she does her utmost to prolong, either in order to make such conditions as she chooses, or to enjoy her power as long as possible, having instinctively divined its impending diminution. But these little boudoir protocols, less numerous than those of the conference at London, occupy too small a place in the story of a genuine passion to be mentioned.

Madame de Beauséant and Monsieur de Nueil lived together for three years in the villa the viscountess had hired on the Lake of Geneva. They remained there quite alone, seeing no one, causing no gossip, rowing on the lake, rising late,—in a word, as happy as we all dream of being. It was a simple little house with green blinds surrounded by large balconies with awnings; a veritable lovers' house, a house with white couches, noiseless carpets and fresh hangings, where everything was bright with joy. From every window, the lake assumed a different aspect; in the distance, the mountains and their fantastic, many-hued fleeting cloud shapes; above them, a clear sky, and in front of them, a broad sheet of capricious, ever-changing water! Nature seemed to dream for them, and everything smiled upon them.

Important business recalled Monsieur de Nueil to France; his brother and father were dead, it was necessary to leave Geneva. The lovers bought the house; they would have liked to break the mountains in pieces and draw the water off from the lake, so that they might take everything with them. Madame de Beauséant accompanied Monsieur de Nueil. She turned her fortune into cash, purchased an estate of some size adjoining Gaston's property, near Manerville, and there they lived together. Monsieur de Nueil gracefully transferred to his mother, the income of the Manerville property in return for her policy of non-interference with his bachelor life. Madame de Beauséant's estate lay near a small town in one of the pleasantest situations in the valley of Auge. There the lovers erected barriers between themselves and the world which neither social ideas nor persons could pass, and renewed their lovely days in Switzerland. For nine whole years they enjoyed happiness which it is vain to describe; the conclusion of this narrative will doubtless disclose their beatitude, to those whose minds can comprehend poesy and prayer in their infinite variations.

Meanwhile, Monsieur le Marquis de Beauséant—his father and older brother were dead—Madame de Beauséant's husband, enjoyed perfect health. Nothing assists us more powerfully to live than the certainty that our death will make some other person happy. Monsieur de Beauséant was one of those satirical, obstinate beings who, like annuitants, have one source of pleasure that others know

nothing of in awaking every morning in good health. He was, by the way, a man of gallantry, a little precise, ceremonious and calculating, and capable of declaring his love to a woman as tranquilly as a servant would say: "Madame is served."

This little biographical notice concerning the Marquis de Beauséant is intended to show the impossibility of a marriage between the marchioness and Monsieur de Nueil.

Now, after these nine years of happiness, the sweetest lease that a woman can ever sign, Monsieur de Nueil and Madame de Beauséant found themselves in a situation quite as natural and quite as false as that in which they had lived since the beginning of their acquaintance; a fatal crisis ensued, nevertheless, of which it is impossible to convey an idea, although its elements may be stated with mathematical accuracy.

Madame la Comtesse de Nueil, Gaston's mother, had never been willing to meet Madame de Beauséant. She was a rigid, virtuous person, who had accomplished the happiness of Monsieur de Nueil senior by perfectly legitimate means. Madame de Beauséant realized that the honorable dowager was certain to be her enemy, and would try to rescue Gaston from his immoral, irreligious existence. The marchioness would have liked to sell her estate and return to Geneva. But that would have been to show distrust of Monsieur de Nueil, and she was incapable of it. Moreover, he had taken a great fancy to Valleroy, where he was setting out many

plantations, and opening a great deal of land to cultivation. Would it not be to deprive him of a sort of mechanical enjoyment which women always like their husbands, and even their lovers, to have? A certain Mademoiselle de la Rodière, twenty-two years old and with forty thousand francs a year, had recently come to the province. Gaston met this heiress at Manerville whenever his duties took him thither. These characters being thus arranged like the figures in an arithmetical proportion, the following letter, written and handed to Gaston one morning, will explain the terrible problem that Madame de Beauséant had been trying for a month past to solve:

"My beloved angel, to write to you when we are living heart to heart, when nothing separates us, when our caresses so often take the place of words, and our words are also caresses, seems a strange thing, does it not? But no, my love. There are certain things a woman cannot say in her lover's presence; the mere thought of them takes away her voice and sends all her blood back to her heart; she is helpless and senseless. To feel so by your side is painful to me; and I do often feel so. I feel that my heart should be all truth to you, should conceal none of its thoughts from you, even the most fleeting; and I love too much the pleasant unconstraint that becomes me so well, to submit longer to embarrassment and constraint. And so I am going to confide my anguish to you; for it is anguish. Listen to me! don't resort to the little *Ta, ta, ta*—with which you impose silence on me with an impertinence that I love, because everything from you pleases me. Dear husband from Heaven, let me say to you that you have effaced all memory of the sorrow beneath whose weight my life was long ago on the point of

giving way. I have known love only through you. The innocence of your noble youth, the purity of your great heart were necessary to satisfy the exactions of an exacting woman's heart. My darling, my heart has often throbbed with joy at the thought that, during these nine years, years so rapid and yet so long, my jealousy has never been aroused. I have had all the flowers of your mind, all your thoughts. There has not been the slightest cloud in our sky, we have not known what a sacrifice was, we have always obeyed the inspiration of our hearts. I have enjoyed a happiness that, for a woman, knows no bounds. Do not the tears that moisten this page tell the whole story of my gratitude? I would have liked to write it on my knees. Ah well! this felicity has caused me to suffer torture more frightful than that of desertion. My dear, a woman's heart has very deep recesses; until to-day I was ignorant of the depth of mine as I was ignorant of the extent of my love. The greatest misery that can overwhelm us is a trivial matter in comparison with the mere idea of the unhappiness of the man we love. And if we were to talk of that unhappiness, should we not die of it? Such is the thought that oppresses me. But it draws in its train another much more crushing; it degrades the glory of love, it puts it to death, it makes of it a humiliating thing that casts a stain upon life forever. You are thirty and I am forty. What terrors that difference in age inspires in a loving woman! You may have felt, at first involuntarily, then seriously, the sacrifices you have made for me by renouncing the world entirely for me. You have thought perhaps of your social destiny, of a marriage which must necessarily augment your fortune, permit you to avow your happiness and your children, to transmit your name and estates, to reappear in the world and to fill your place there with honor. But you have repressed such thoughts, happy to sacrifice an heiress, a fortune and a glorious future to me, without my knowledge. In your youthful generosity, you have determined to remain faithful to the oaths which bind us together only in God's sight. My past suffering has recurred to you,

and I have been protected by the misery from which you rescued me. To owe your love to compassion! that thought is even more horrible to me than the fear of making your life a failure. Those men who can make up their minds to plunge a dagger in their mistresses' hearts are very charitable when they kill them while they are still happy and unsuspecting, and in all the glory of their illusion. Yes, death is preferable to the two thoughts that have secretly cast a shadow over my hours for some days past. Yesterday, when you asked me so gently: *What is the matter?* your voice made me shudder. I fancied that you were reading my heart as usual, and I awaited your confidences, imagining that my presentiments were realized, that I had rightly divined the arguments of your reason. I thereupon remembered certain little attentions which you are in the habit of paying me, but in which I thought I could detect that sort of affectation with which men show that their loyalty has become a grievous burden. At that moment I paid very dearly for my happiness; I felt that nature always sells us the treasures of love. Indeed, has not fate separated us? You will have said to yourself: 'Sooner or later, I shall have to leave dear Claire; why not part from her in time?' That phrase was written in your glance. I left you, to go and weep alone. To hide my tears from you! they were the first tears grief had caused me to shed for ten years, and I was too proud to show them to you; but I did not blame you. Yes, you are right, I must not be so selfish as to make your long, brilliant life subordinate to mine, which will soon be worn out. But suppose I made a mistake? Suppose I took one of the melancholy fits of your love for an effort of your reason? Oh! my angel, do not leave me in uncertainty; punish your jealous wife, but restore to her the certainty of her love and yours; the whole existence of woman is in that sentiment, which sanctifies everything. Since your mother's arrival, and since you saw Mademoiselle de la Rodière at her house, I have been besieged with doubts which dishonor us. Force me to suffer, but do not deceive me; I wish to know everything—what your mother says and what

you think! If you have hesitated between anybody else and me, I give you back your liberty. I will hide my fate from you; I shall be able to refrain from weeping before you; but I do not want to see you again. Oh! I must stop, for my heart is breaking * * * * * *

"For some moments I sat here dazed and stupid. My darling, I can summon no pride to my assistance against you, you are so frank, so good! You could not wound me or deceive me; but you will tell me the truth, however cruel it may be. Shall I encourage your confession? Very well; my dear heart, I shall be comforted by a woman's reflection. Shall I not have possessed you when you were young and pure, all grace, all beauty, all refinement, a Gaston whom no woman can ever know again, and whom I have enjoyed beyond words? No, you will never love again as you have loved me; I shall never have a rival. My memories will be devoid of bitterness when I think of our love, and I shall think of nothing else. Is it not beyond your power to enchant any woman hereafter with the childish cajolery, the youthful playfulness of a young heart, with the graces of mind and body and the swift appreciation of pleasure, in a word, by the adorable *cortége* that follows in the train of youthful love? Ah! you are a man now, you will obey your destiny by considering the effect of whatever you do. You will have duties, anxieties, ambitions, cares that will deprive *her* of the constant, unchanging smile with which your lips were always embellished for me. Your voice, always so soft to me, will sometimes be cross. Your eyes, which always shone with a divine light when they fell upon me, will often be clouded for *her*. And then, as it is impossible to love you as I do, that woman will never be as dear to you as I have been. She will not devote the constant attention to her own appearance that I have done, and will not make the continual study of your happiness which has enabled me infallibly to divine its needs. Yes, the man, the heart, the mind that I have known, will no longer exist; I will bury them in my memory, that I may still enjoy them, and live happy in the

lovely past, but a stranger to everything that does not concern ourselves.

"But, my dearest treasure, if you have not conceived the slightest thought of liberty, if my love is not a burden to you, if my tears are chimerical, if I am still your EVE, the only woman in the world for you, then, when you have read this letter, come! fly! Ah! I will love you in an instant more than I have ever loved you, I think, during these nine years. After undergoing the vain torture of these suspicions with which I reproach myself, every day will add to our love—yes, a single day will be a whole lifetime of happiness. So, speak! be frank: do not deceive me, for it would be a crime. Tell me! do you want your liberty? Have you reflected upon your life as a man? Have you one regret? I cause you one regret! I should die of it. I have said to you: I love you enough to prefer your happiness to my own, your life to my own. Lay aside, if you can, the rich memory of our nine years of happiness, so that they may not influence your decision; but speak! I submit my fate to you as to God, the only comforter who remains to me if you desert me."

When Madame de Beauséant knew that the letter was in Monsieur de Nueil's hands, she fell into such a state of prostration, her meditations were so bewildered on account of the superabundance of her thoughts, that she was like one asleep. In very truth, she suffered such agony as women alone know,—agony that has never been adjusted to woman's powers of endurance. While the unhappy marchioness was awaiting her fate, Monsieur de Nueil was, upon reading her letter, very much *embarrassed*, to use the term employed by young men at such crises. He had at that time almost yielded to his mother's instigations and the attractions of

Mademoiselle de la Rodière,—a decidedly insignificant young person straight as a poplar, pink and white, and half-dumb, according to the programme prescribed for all marriageable maidens; but her forty thousand francs a year in real estate spoke sufficiently for her. Madame de Nueil, assisted by her sincere maternal affection, sought to enlist her son on the side of virtue. She called his attention to the fact that it was most flattering to him to be preferred by Mademoiselle de la Rodière, when so many rich *partis* were offered her; it was high time to think of his future; such an excellent opportunity would not occur again; some day he would have eighty thousand a year in landed property; fortune makes up for everything; if Madame de Beauséant loved him for himself, she should be the first to urge him to marry; in short, the fond mother forgot none of the methods by which a woman can influence a man's mind. And she had made her son waver. Madame de Beauséant's letter arrived at a moment when Gaston's love was struggling against all the seductions of a life arranged in conformity with worldly ideas and with due regard to propriety; but that letter decided the battle. He resolved to leave the marchioness and marry.

"One must live a man's life!" he said to himself.

Then he thought of the grief his resolution would cause his mistress. His vanity as a man, as well as his conscience as a lover, increased his idea of what that grief would be, and he was seized with sincere compassion. He suddenly became conscious

of the immensity of the disaster, and deemed it both necessary and charitable to deaden the cruel wound. He hoped to be able to bring Madame de Beauséant to a tranquil frame of mind and to lead her to command him to enter into this marriage, by accustoming her gradually to the idea of a necessary separation, by leaving Mademoiselle de la Rodière always between them as a phantom, and by sacrificing her to the marchioness in the first place, only to delude the marchioness into sacrificing herself voluntarily later. He went so far, in order to succeed in this compassionate undertaking, as to rely upon her nobility and pride and the grandeur of her heart. He answered her therefore, in order to put her suspicions to sleep. Answered her! To a woman who combined with the intention of true love the most delicate perception the human mind is capable of, the letter was a death-sentence. And so, when Jacques entered the room, when he walked toward Madame de Beauséant to hand her a paper folded triangularly, the poor woman started like a swallow caught in a net. A strange shiver passed over her from head to foot, enveloping her like an icy shroud. If he did not rush to her feet, if he did not come to her weeping, pale, loving, it was all over. And yet hope is so buoyant in the hearts of women who love; so many dagger-thrusts are required to destroy their hope, and they love and bleed to the last.

"Does madame require anything?" Jacques asked softly as he withdrew.

"No," said she.

"Poor man!" she thought, wiping away a tear; "he guesses my secret, he, a valet!"

She read: *My beloved, you invent chimeras.* As she saw those words, a thick veil fell over the marchioness's eyes. The secret voice of her heart cried to her: "He lies!" Then her glance embraced the whole first page with the species of lucid avidity that passion imparts, and she read at the bottom these words: *Nothing is decided.* Turning the page with convulsive eagerness, she saw distinctly the sentiment that had dictated the involved phrases of the letter, in which she no longer recognized the impetuous outbursts of love; she crumpled it, twisted it, tore it, bit at it, threw it into the fire, and cried:

"Oh! the villain! he has possessed me since he ceased to love me!"

And, half-dead, she fell upon a couch.

Monsieur de Nueil went out after writing his letter. When he returned, he found Jacques in the doorway, and Jacques handed him a letter saying:

"Madame la Marquise is no longer at the château."

Monsieur de Nueil, in great surprise, broke the seal and read:

"Madame, confess that if I should cease to love you and should accept the prospects you put before me of being a man like other men, I should deserve my fate. No, I will not obey you, and I swear to be faithful to you until death dissolves my oath. Oh! take my life, unless indeed you fear to give yourself cause for remorse."

It was the note he had written the marchioness when she was setting out for Geneva. Claire de Bourgogne had added these words: *Monsieur, you are free.*

Monsieur de Nueil returned to his mother at Manerville. Three weeks later, he married Mademoiselle Stéphanie de la Rodière.

If this narrative of a commonplace truth should end at this point, it would be almost a mystification. Have not almost all men a more interesting story to tell themselves? But the noise made by the *dénoûment*, unhappily true, and such memories as it may awaken in the hearts of those who have known the divine joys of a boundless passion, and have shattered it themselves or lost it through some cruel fatality, will perhaps place this tale beyond the reach of criticism.

Madame la Marquise de Beauséant did not leave her château of Valleroy at the time of her separation from Monsieur de Nueil. For a multitude of reasons which we must leave buried in women's hearts—moreover, every woman will divine those that seem convincing to her—Claire continued to live there after Monsieur de Nueil's marriage. She lived in such complete retirement, that her own servants—her maid and Jacques alone excepted—never saw her. She exacted absolute silence in her house and never left her apartments except to go to the chapel at Valleroy, where a priest from the neighborhood said mass every morning.

Some days after his marriage, the Comte de Nueil

fell into a sort of conjugal apathy, which might imply happiness as well as unhappiness.

His mother said to everybody:

"My son is perfectly happy."

Madame Gaston de Nueil, like many young wives, was a little dull, meek and patient; she became enceinte after they had been married a month. All this was quite in conformity with the accepted ideas. Monsieur de Nueil was very kind to her; but, two months after leaving the marchioness, he became very thoughtful and absent-minded. But he had always been serious, his mother said.

After seven months of this lukewarm felicity, certain events happened, apparently of slight importance, which denoted, however, such momentous mental developments and such vast upheavals of the heart, that they should not be set down without explanation and left to the capricious interpretation of each individual mind. One day, when Monsieur de Nueil had been hunting upon the estates of Manerville and Valleroy, he returned through Madame de Beauséant's park, sent for Jacques and waited until he came, when he asked:

"Is the marchioness still fond of game?"

Upon receiving an affirmative reply from Jacques, Gaston offered him a considerable sum, accompanied with very specious arguments, to obtain from him the trifling favor of setting aside for the marchioness the contents of his game bag. It seemed to Jacques of small importance whether his mistress ate a partridge killed by her keepers or by Monsieur

de Nueil, as that gentleman did not desire the marchioness to know where the game came from.

"It was killed on her land," said the count.

Jacques assisted in this harmless deception for several days. Monsieur de Nueil would go out hunting in the morning, and not return until dinner, but he had never shot anything. A whole week passed in this way. Gaston made bold to write a long letter to the marchioness and to make sure that it reached her. The letter was returned to him unopened. It was almost dark when the marchioness's valet brought it to him. The count rushed abruptly from the salon where he was pretending to listen to a caprice of Hérold which his wife was murdering upon the piano, and ran to the marchioness's house with the speed of a man flying to a rendezvous. He leaped into the park through a breach that he knew of, walked slowly along the paths, pausing from time to time as if to try to repress the loud beating of his heart; when he was near the château, he listened to the muffled sounds and concluded that all the servants were at table. He went as far as Madame de Beauséant's apartments. The marchioness never left her bedroom. Monsieur de Nueil succeeded in reaching the door without making the least noise. There he saw, by the light of two candles, the marchioness, pale and emaciated, seated in a great easy-chair, her brow bent, her hands hanging at her sides, her eyes fixed upon some object which she seemed not to see. There was the most heartbroken sorrow in her expression.

There was a vague suggestion of hope in her attitude, but it was impossible to say whether Claire de Bourgogne was looking toward the tomb or into the past. Perhaps Monsieur de Nueil's tears glistened in the darkness, perhaps his breathing made a slight noise, perhaps an involuntary sigh escaped him, or perhaps his presence was impossible without the phenomenon of introsusception, which is at once the glory, the joy and the test of true love. Madame de Beauséant turned her face toward the door and saw her former lover. Monsieur de Nueil thereupon stepped forward a few steps.

"If you come nearer, monsieur," cried the marchioness, turning pale, "I will throw myself out of the window!"

She jumped upon the window-seat, threw the window open and placed one foot on the sill outside, with her hand on the balcony-rail and her face turned toward Gaston.

"Go! go!" she cried, "or I jump."

At that terrible cry, Monsieur de Nueil, hearing a commotion among the servants, fled like a criminal.

He returned home, wrote a very short letter and bade his valet carry it to Madame de Beauséant and to give her to understand that, for him, it concerned a matter of life or death. When the messenger had gone, Monsieur de Nueil returned to the salon and found his wife there, still mangling the caprice. He sat down, awaiting a reply. An hour later, the caprice being at an end, the husband and wife were sitting silent, opposite each other, on each side of

the fireplace, when the valet returned from Valleroy and handed his master the letter, which had not been opened. Monsieur de Nueil walked into the boudoir adjoining the salon, where he had placed his gun on his return from hunting, and shot himself.

This prompt and fatal conclusion, so contrary to all the customs of young France, was quite natural.

Those people who have carefully observed or blissfully experienced the phenomena to which the perfect union of two beings gives birth, will perfectly understand this suicide. A woman does not form herself, does not mould herself in a day to the caprices of passion. Pleasure, like a rare flower, demands the most ingenious care and cultivation; time and perfect accord between two hearts can alone reveal all its resources and bring forth the keen and exquisite enjoyment, concerning which we are imbued with countless superstitions and which we believe to be inherent in the person whose heart lavishes it upon us. This admirable mutual understanding, this religious faith and the regenerating certainty of feeling a peculiar or excessive delight beside the loved one, explain in part the secret of durable attachments and long-enduring passions. With a woman who possesses the genius of her sex, love never degenerates into a habit; her adorable tenderness has the art of assuming such varied forms, she is so bright and so loving at the same moment, she imports so many artifices into her nature, so much that is natural into her artifices, that

she exerts as much power in her lover's mind when absent as by her presence. Beside her, all women seem pale shadows. One must have known the fear of losing, or must have lost so vast and glorious a love, to appreciate its real worth. But if a man who has appreciated it to the full, deprives himself of it to enter into a dull, loveless marriage; if the wife with whom he has hoped to experience the same felicity proves to him, by some of those incidents that are buried in the darkness of conjugal life, that it will never be born again for him; if he still has upon his lips the taste of a celestial love, and knows that he has mortally wounded his veritable wife for the benefit of a social chimera, then he must die unless he have recourse to that material, selfish, cold philosophy that fills passionate hearts with horror.

As for Madame de Beauséant, she did not, in all probability, believe that her lover's despair would go so far as suicide, after she had quenched his thirst with copious draughts of love for nine years. Perhaps she thought that she alone would have to suffer. Moreover, she was abundantly in the right to refuse to be concerned in the most degrading division of privileges that can exist,—a division that a wife may endure for social reasons, but that a mistress should hold in detestation, because the only justification of her love is found in its purity.

Angoulême, September, 1832.

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